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ABSTRACT

The research circle is a form of cooperation between trade unions and researchers that is spreading all over Sweden and beyond its national borders. The research circles described in this book were arranged jointly by SKAF (Swedish Municipal Workers' Union) and the Uppsala University Department of Education. A research circle is a study circle in which researchers participate. Another characteristic is that the work focuses on a problem that a union or other practitioners have brought to the circle's attention because it would benefit from a closer examination. The most important resource that can be used systematically in this analysis is the knowledge and experience of the union participants themselves. The participating researcher may also possess important information about the problem under study. Research circles are based on the cooperation of all participants and everyone's knowledge is of equal value and use. The participants have a mutual respect for each other, and there is a willingness on the part of the participants to change something. The research circle liberates people from conventional structures and can be a highly creative environment. The difficulty of this approach is that the work is done slowly as unions and researcher take the time to get to know each other and bridge the gaps between their different outlooks and notions. Research circles reveal a great deal about various educational processes and how they can be related to the conditions under which diverse groups in society operate. (DGM)

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The Research Circle – Building Knowledge on Equal Terms

Gunilla Härnsten

The Research Circle – Building Knowledge on Equal Terms
– Forskningscirkeln – pedagogiska perspektiv

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List of Abbreviations

AIC	Arbetslivscentrum Center for Working Life
ALFOFAK	ArbetsLivsForskning som bygger på Fackliga Kunskapsbehov Working Life Research based on the Knowledge Needs of the Trade Unions
ESREA	European Society for Research on the Education of Adults
FRN	Forskningsrådsnämnden Swedish Council for Planning and Coordination of Research
IPF	Institutet för personal- och företagsutveckling The Uppsala Institute for Personnel and Organizational Development
LAN	Länsarbetsnämnden County Labor Board
LO	Landsorganisationen Swedish Trade Union Confederation
LOFO	LOs forskningspolitiska utskott The LO Committee on Research Politics
NAVF	Norges allmennvitenskapelige forskningsråd The Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PAR	Participatory Action Research
RUC	Roskilde utbildningscenter Roskilde University Center (Denmark)
SACO	Sveriges Akademikers Centralorganisation Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations

SAS	Scandinavian Airline Systems
SKAF	Svenska kommunalarbetsförbundet Swedish Municipal Workers' Union
Spri	Sjukvårdens och socialvårdens planerings- och rationaliseringsinstitut Swedish Institute for Health Services Development
TCO	Tjänstemännens centralorganisation Central Organization of Salaried Employees
TREFF	Trepartssamverkan Fack Forskare Three-way Cooperation Unions and Researchers

Preface to the English Edition

This is an updated and translated version of my book *Forskningscirkeln - pedagogiska perspektiv* (The Research Circle-Educational Perspectives), which was published on the occasion of a congress held by LO, the Swedish Trade Union Confederation in June, 1991.

The research circle is a form of cooperation between trade unions and researchers that is spreading all over Sweden and in recent years even beyond our national borders. The idea for this book was born during a discussion on cooperation between labor organizations and universities in the fall of 1989. With the assistance of Lars Fernvall, LOFO, I was given the opportunity to do an in-depth study of research circles from an educational perspective during a three-month-period in the spring of 1990. I would like to take this opportunity to thank both him and my other benefactors.

The research circles I have participated in and describe in this book were arranged jointly by SKAF (Swedish Municipal Workers' Union) and the Uppsala University department of education. My participation in the circles was funded by FRN (the Swedish Council for Planning and Coordination of Research).

I especially want to thank the participants - the women - in both circles for everything they shared with me, both in terms of life experience and professional skills.

Since the work with research circles is above all a collective experience, as evidenced by what follows in this text, I also want to point out that this book could not have been written if it had not been for the cooperation that is always going on among the multitude of "research circle researchers". Our number has grown over the years, as can be seen from my many references to other works in the text. That is not to say that I am not solely accountable for everything contained herein, but since my cooperation with Lars Holmstrand has been so intense and we have co-authored so many articles about the research circle (most recently Holmstrand and Hårnsten 1994. See also Holmstrand and Hårnsten 1992 and 1993), I particularly want to thank Lars for our many, long discussions about the research circle, its uses and significance.

Furthermore, the ALFOFAK work (see below, under the section entitled Examples of Research Circles) has meant more contacts, both with researchers and union representatives, and this has increased my appreciation of this form of cooperation. Its importance has certainly not diminished in these last few years, when Sweden has been in the hands of a conservative government for the second time since the Second World War. In three years, this government has "succeeded" in not just threatening but

actually tearing down large parts of the welfare state that we so diligently have been trying to construct. As can be seen from the concrete example of the cleaning women in a county council hospital, Sweden's public sector is being dismantled in an alarming way. Daycare centers, schools, health care, libraries and other kinds of public services are being scrapped at an unprecedented rate. In this kind of Sweden, a collective counterattack is needed now more than ever.

It is in this context that I hope the research circle will find its niche and its mission. There are many things we must try to safeguard for the future and there are many good things that can be improved on, instead of eliminated. This is a work that must be done by the many, for the many. Research and researchers have their own particular tasks and importance in this work.

In the course of discussing and introducing the research circle in a variety of other countries (England, Austria, Switzerland, Chile, Brazil, etc.) in recent years, we have become increasingly aware of the importance of good educational models and new forms of cooperation between theory and practise and between researchers and practitioners. The particular work method and form of cooperation that is introduced and analyzed here is needed in many parts of the world in order to achieve what we as educational researchers still hope to contribute toward in some way – a better world to live in.

Uppsala, May 1994
Gunilla Harnsten

Background

Introduction

This report should be considered a *preliminary contribution* to an educational analysis of the research circle. First, some words to explain what is meant by a research circle.

In short, a research circle can be described as a study circle in which researchers participate. Another characteristic is that the work focuses on a problem that a union or other practitioners have brought to the circle's attention because it would benefit from a closer examination. As a rule, there are certain knowledge resources that can be used systematically in this analysis, the most important being the knowledge and experience of the union participants themselves. The participating researcher may also possess important information about the problem under study. In addition, he or she can contribute his or her professional skills, such as the systematic analysis of a problem. Finally, the researcher can contact and invite other researchers who are well-versed in areas that need to be mastered in order to gain a deeper understanding of the problem.

This description is a basic model that has been used and is still being used in many different ways and in order to attack many different types of problems. Today, research circles are going on in almost all parts of Sweden and interest in this method is spreading beyond our national boundaries.

To work in a research circle is to be engaged in a continuous dialogue. In the same way, I hope that the contents of this book will prompt a dialogue about the research circle. Since my work was limited in time, it is only *one contribution* to an ongoing discussion and cooperation between the different researchers who are involved in research circles. I make *no claims that this is the one true theory or method*, and at present several researchers in different locations in Sweden are analyzing the theory and practise of the research circle. Since we have all been working with different types of research circles (see below) and because we belong to different academic disciplines, we have a lot to learn from each other. One good sign is that "research circle researchers" appear to be less afflicted by the elsewhere omnipresent academic illness of wanting to keep your results and knowledge to yourself until they are presented in a finished work. I hope, instead, that this work will provide an impetus to continued development and cooperation.

I myself have worked as a special education teacher in the primary schools for many years and my research has centered on the regular education system. This clearly enables me to perceive learning in a slightly different light than other researchers involved with research circle work. Among

other things, my years of teaching have provided me with extensive knowledge of how individuals and groups of students are left behind in our mandatory school system. In my dissertation (Härnsten 1988), I underlined the social causes of this process and examined attempts by socialist teachers (in Sweden, Denmark, England and former West Germany) to change it. *I have concluded that any basic changes in the school system must come from the outside and that alliances must form between the working class and the progressive forces that do exist in limited numbers in the schools.* In order for such alliances to be effective, the labor movement organizations must at all levels be composed of strong and politically aware individuals. People are shaped by their childhood and early experiences, but a lot of important learning takes place in working life too, for better or for worse. I have found the research circle to be one way of taking advantage of and strengthening the positive aspects of learning and eventually of changing the situation. Changes that affect working life and those who are actively involved in it will also have repercussions on the education system, which in turn will have an impact on working life, etc. (Cf. theories developed by Basil Bernstein, e.g. Bernstein 1977.)

With my experience and background, I have found it highly meaningful to work with research circles, where the conditions, still within certain limits of course, are completely different and significantly more in line with an educational practise that takes people seriously.

The Structure of the Report

To start with, I will give a short summary of how the notion of *research circle* has been used by researchers and other participants who have direct experience of this work form. I will also describe the vast need that seems to exist for this type of educational practise.

Next, I will examine the research circle in terms of its significance to educational researchers and relate recent results from a few research areas that are closely related to the domain of the research circle. This will in no way be a comprehensive account, and the areas discussed, i.e. *research about research information, research about adult education and research about the study circle tradition* are not comparable. The results that have been emerging from these different fields are, however, similar in that they signal a strong need for other educational practises. It is my belief, too, that educational research can make valuable contributions to areas that have not traditionally been the object of educational analyses.

One major section is entitled *The Research Circle as an Instrument of Change*. Here, I first discuss similar research areas and adjacent activity forms. Next, I provide examples of different research circles and give a more detailed

description of the research circles in which I have participated. As a result, the section *My Personal Experiences* is written in a different style than the rest of this work. This is inevitable, since it is simply a straightforward account of what went on in these circles. Most of this material has been published before in a conference report from the Center for Working Life (1990).

Under the heading *The Theoretical Background of the Research Circle*, I give a brief introduction to some early educators whose ideas may help explain the processes at work in research circles. The educators chosen all share a conviction that education can never be neutral, but is always used with a certain intention. A preliminary analysis of the circles I have described in the light of these theories completes the section.

In conclusion, I sum up the main characteristics of the *research circle* and discuss the significance of this method in a free quest for knowledge. I do not, however, provide a model for how a circle ought to work, since I am firmly convinced that this is a highly dynamic method that depends on cooperation among people that may be very different from each other and whose reactions may differ and sometimes be completely unpredictable.

Some General Notes on Research Circles

The research circle is something as simple as a possibility to cooperate among people who trust each other and share a few basic convictions. By now, many participants, both researchers and "organizers" of research circles, have described both the purpose of the circles and their common ground. What follows below is my selection from these comments.

At a conference in the Center for Working Life on February 1, 1990, research circles were discussed under the double heading of *The acquisition of knowledge by local unions in cooperation with researchers* and *New insight into working life research based on union cooperation*. The introduction begins:

Research circles engage practitioners – often from unions – and researchers in a joint effort to develop new knowledge. This development of knowledge typically consists of *taking stock of, increasing the knowledge about and eventually solving problems in working life*, e.g. in the work environment or the organization or content of the work. In this perspective, the research circle is a part of a union's work process. The conventional, set form of the study circle is not suitable for this purpose, which is to develop or collect knowledge that has not previously been recognized. The work in a circle

usually starts off with a definition of the issue to be studied, the available resources and the work forms that can be used. Both practitioners and researchers come to the research circle equipped with their own knowledge, skills and insights. (From the invitation to the conference, ALC 1990)

The expression *research circle* was coined by Karl-Axel Nilsson during a course that he and some of his colleagues organized at Lund University in 1976-77 for union representatives. This is Nilsson's description of the research circle in a paper submitted to the above-mentioned conference:

Our discussions have brought us to the point of viewing the extended experimental activities with research circles as part of the process of organizing and developing the exchange of knowledge between researchers and union representatives. These research circles can be used for a variety of purposes. The circle could opt to work on problems of a more universal nature and then it would turn into something like a course. The research circle also makes it possible to gear the studies to suit the union work. In this case, the knowledge is used both for immediate action by the unions and for long-term union work. Researchers with an interest in and knowledge about the problem chosen by the circle are recruited from the university. Their main function is to convey information about research...

We assumed that the researchers would also stand to gain something from this participation. The reciprocal nature of the research circle was a fundamental feature. The researchers were not to function as teachers, but rather participants of the circle. The exchange would consist in knowledge and useful contacts for ongoing research. The possibilities to use the research circles to plan new research were discussed from the beginning, but we did not see the circles as a direct way to conduct research projects. (Nilsson 1990, p 6)

Here, it can be seen that the research information function was emphasized at the beginning. People in other parts of Sweden, where more and more research circles have been starting, have also been willing to describe the significance of the meeting that takes place in a research circle and the character of that meeting.

Birgitta Eriksson, a researcher with many years' experience from circles in Värmland, a county in western Sweden, including those arranged within the framework of the TREFF project (Three-way Cooperation Researchers and Unions), described her view of research circles in her contribution to the conference as follows:

Although the research circles that have been arranged in Värmland have been and are different from each other, there are certain common features that practically all of them share. They are based on a cooperation among the participants in which everybody's knowledge and experience are of equal value and use. The participants have a mutual respect for each other and for the others' competence. In addition, when the research circle is initiated, there is a willingness on the part of the participants to change something. (Eriksson 1990, p 7)

The TREFF project in Karlstad also gave rise to several reports about the methodology of the research circle (e.g. Bergsten 1986). In Uppsala, a description of the basic ideas and principles of the research circle has been presented in a short paper (Holmstrand, Härnsten and Isacson 1989):

It is also a way to deal with problems that otherwise receive no attention, either in union work or in research. The research circle liberates us from conventional structures, it is a new form, a kind of forum that provides a free space where we may reflect both on everyday problems and on more universal matters. At best, new perspectives open up and the foundation of a new quest for knowledge is established. For all the circle participants (union representatives and researchers), the research circle means a possibility to leave the everyday work behind for a moment. It lets you step back and think about the situation. Under favorable conditions, the research circle can be a highly creative environment. (Holmstrand et al 1989, p 3)

These and other descriptions all touch on the importance of the meeting, the cooperation, the freedom from conventional forms. Ingrid Wahlund, TCO, who has followed the work with research circles from a central position, has pointed out that it has not always been easy to find well-functioning work methods, even within a given framework:

The cooperation between unions and researchers is, however, a relatively new phenomenon. This is why it has sometimes taken a certain time to find suitable forms for the cooperation. This part of the work has occasionally presented difficulties. In some cases, the union representatives have expected the work to go a lot quicker and be more practically oriented. At the same time, the researchers may at times have lacked the necessary depth of knowledge both of the reality being studied and the working conditions of the unions. In order to facilitate meaningful cooperation between unions and researchers, it is therefore important to take one's time in getting to know each other and bridging the gaps between different outlooks and notions. (Wahlund 1990, p 5)

This means that the way the circle develops is largely dependent on the background, experience, interests and views of knowledge of the various participants, both practitioners and researcher(s).

My discussion of the research circle from an educational point of view is obviously primarily based on the circles that I have had direct contact with. *These are circles held at the workplace, consisting of women of a restricted educational background, among whom many are immigrants. In my capacity as researcher from the department of education, I was the main participating researcher.* Therefore, my observations cannot be extended to include all types of research circles. Nevertheless, they reveal a great deal about different educational processes and how they can be related to the conditions under which different groups in society operate.

Above all, these observations provide examples of how poorly-educated groups in society can be reached through education and how they can be stimulated into demanding education and research that may help them change their work situation.

It is also a matter of how to develop and strengthen the *internal democracy* of the labor movement, which I maintain is a prerequisite for a well-functioning *external democracy*.

Therefore, when you come right down to it, this is a matter of democracy.

The Research Circle – an Educational Concern

The Research Circle Answers a Collective Need

The growth of the research circle is most frequently described as in the quotation above by Karl-Axel Nilsson. At approximately the same time as Nilsson started his circles, however, activities based on similar ideas were going on in other places. In 1977, for example, Jan Holmer and several other researchers at the University of Göteborg and the Chalmers Institute of Technology started study circles and other educational programs together with shipyard workers at the Götaverken shipyard in Göteborg. In his dissertation *Higher Education for Low-Skilled Industrial Workers*, Holmer presents a detailed analysis of these and other projects (Holmer 1987). This way of working was not unique to Sweden. In former West Germany there were some early attempts at cooperation between union members and researchers, e.g. that on which Negt based his theories (see chapter on "The Theoretical Background of the Research Circle"). It is surely relevant too that Karl-Axel Nilsson and others found themselves in that special setting, the Department of Education at Lund University, where the form and content of educational theory were undergoing profound changes in the mid-seventies (see, for example, Kall—s, Köhler and Nilsson, 1971). A related work form can be seen in the parent education approach that Eva-Mari Köhler developed on the basis of an experimental project in the fall of 1974. Her pilot study resulted in an educational material, *Parent Education* (Köhler 1976), which highlights the importance of using the knowledge that people have and shows how to process this knowledge with the assistance of researchers. As Köhler explains it in her book:

An important source of knowledge in teaching and in working with the study material is your own experiences. By becoming aware of them and thinking them over, you increase your own knowledge of how to be a parent. You learn to think and act in the light of the knowledge you have gained and you are able to compare your experience with that of other people, which is yet another source of new knowledge. (Köhler, 1976, p 8)

Köhler goes on to tell us that the material contains results from different studies of children and parents, but she urges her readers to be critical of such information:

But you also need to adopt a critical attitude toward research and findings from different studies. How do these findings agree with your own experience? It's

not enough for you to recognize a little here and a little there in the results that are presented. You need to understand, see and feel that what is stated is true in real life. (ibid)

Her work on parent education led to new perspectives and ideas for continued research, which are presented in e.g. *Study of the Environment of Children* and *Swedish Child-rearing* (Köhler 1975 and 1981). Although this work did not involve union representatives (even if many of the participants were from the working class), it is an example of how people's previously ignored experience can be merged with "scientific" results and lead to the formation of new knowledge. The common denominator is the fundamental conviction that people harbor unexplored resources.

The research circle, then, can be said to have developed out of a collective need in the working class that coincided with a collective knowledge held by certain researchers. The research circle may also be valuable as a counterbalance to the private sector's monopoly on the use of education and research. Anders Mathiesen perceived this early on:

A company decides to adopt new technology and chooses its particular way of organizing the work on the basis of profit. New technology is introduced when it is profitable and any consequences in the form of increased demands on the qualifications of the labor force (changes in the structure of the workplace) are reduced to a "managable" problem. This is done by e.g. altering the organization of the work and/or is perceived as the personal problem of the workers. *Only by mobilizing the political power of the working class can we fight this tendency. To this end, the unions need to develop an educational strategy.* (Mathiessen 1976, p 130) (My italics)

In view of the recent changes in society, it is natural for the unions to seek out new paths. It is probably not a coincidence, therefore, that activities involving research circles are now on the rise.

As an educational concern, the reserach circle may be defined by examining some existing research areas that have their own theories and focus on special problems, namely:

- Research about research information
- Research about adult education
- Research about the study circle tradition

Research about Research Information

There is substantive research being done about the information of research, both in Sweden and in other countries. However, research information has not been perceived as an important educational issue, especially not in the Scandinavian countries. In May 1990, a two-day Scandinavian conference was held on the subject of "the transfer of knowledge and the preservation of knowledge". The conference was organized by the then newly formed organization, "Forum for the Preservation of Knowledge", together with the Dalarna Research Council in Falun. This occasion too was short on contributions by educational researchers and the problem's educational aspects were only lightly touched on. I believe, however, that an educational analysis would provide new and fruitful insights into this area. I share this view with, among others, Thomas Tydén, who contributed an article to the anthology that was published after the conference, in which he describes the transmission of knowledge as a "classical educational issue" (Tydén 1990b) Cf. also his dissertation (Tydén 1993). The following summary of current research is based on the papers that were presented at the conference (and subsequently printed, see Tydén 1990a). Most of these were written by researchers in sociology or political science.

In these articles, several different aspects of the problem of research information start to emerge. These concern *the research per se*, i.e. its content, form and direction, as well as *the information process*, i.e. different venues and means, and *the recipients*, the uses available to different groups, etc. In her contribution to the conference, sociologist Ruth Lönn (1990) attempts to define different concepts in order to facilitate the discussion. When analyzing the concept of research, she first refers to the conventional definitions of research drawn up by the OECD, i.e. *basic research*, *applied research* and *developmental work*, but she goes on immediately to say that these divisions are in reality quite arbitrary. R&D, i.e. research and development, are increasingly regarded as a pair. In the Statute on Higher Education, for instance, this is mentioned in connection with research information. It can be seen, therefore, that researchers are under the same obligation to report their results irrespective of how their research is defined.

Lönn uses a report from the Swedish Council for Planning and Coordination of Research (FRN) as the basis for defining different areas that fall under the category of research information (FRN 1983). This leads to the

following division: *General research information, User information and Scientific and technical information maintenance.*

Lönn concedes, however, that this division is not very clear-cut either.

THE RECIPIENTS. *The recipients and the function of research* to them have been analyzed to a considerable degree. Lönn mentions three frequently cited names: Carol Weiss, Helga Nowotny and Judith Larsen. In Sweden, the work of these researchers has been carefully reviewed by, among others, Sune Sunesson (e.g. in Nilsson and Sunesson 1988) and Tomas Tydén (Tydén 1988). The main concepts that Rut Lönn derives from these researchers are those of *conceptual function* and *instrumental function*. Swedish studies on the use of research have been carried out mainly in the fields of social politics, construction and medicine. Based on these studies, which of course differ among themselves, but which also have much in common, Lönn states:

What they have in common is their view that the instrumental use of research is more or less tangible. Research is used in power struggles, to justify decisions and to professionalize work. Social networks and personal contacts in general are useful to convey the results of R&D.

The people in charge appropriate R&D results when needed and when the person imparting the results is trustworthy. If you wish to spread R&D information, you need to pick the right person to impart the results and the right outlets. (Lönn 1990, p 2)

Many of the other papers focus on the instrumental use of research results. One of these is "Transmitting knowledge in a regional perspective" (Støkken 1990). In an outline to a research project, Ann Marie Støkken discusses the two different pictures that have gradually started to emerge:

One of the pictures concerns the transmission of "solutions." It is a matter of concrete or instrumental information, where it is relatively clear what is to be transmitted. The object is to have the message received. The knowledge is seen as a kind of product. Both packaging and form are important. Technological subjects and language courses are both examples of this.

In the other picture, a higher value is placed on the transmission of new perspectives, approaches or

alternative ways of understanding a problem than on solutions. I believe that in the social sciences this kind of knowledge prevails. In the social sciences, we do not often provide solutions or concrete answers.

In this view, transmitting knowledge is more a question of creating forums or "meeting places" for intellectual "thinking out loud" or for synchronizing a perspective. (Støkken 1990, p 126)

Tuula Laaksovirta uses mainly the same definitions in her paper, although she makes no generic division between the social and the natural sciences based on the way the research is used:

In research about research, the ways in which scientific results are used have served as the differentiating criteria. On the one hand, people talk about instrumental use, which means that you use the results to legitimize your decisions, i.e. legitimization use. On the other hand, there is enlightenment use (Stolte and Heiskanen 1970, p 6). According to the enlightenment model, research about society does not in itself solve any problems in society. Instead, it is the basis for developing intellectual ways of using research, as well as forming premises, setting the direction and making the results accessible. (Laaksovirta 1990, p 192)

Further on, Laaksovirta adds that the enlightenment model is not limited only to the social sciences. She claims that a prime example of where the enlightenment model would be more appropriate than the instrumental model, would be in the information sector in the medical world, where it could be useful in spreading information about preventive medicine.

The researcher would tend to agree with the view that the transmission of knowledge from the (social) sciences opens up new solutions, approaches or perspectives. Unfortunately Kjell Nilsson and Sune Sunesson (1990) and others have shown this to be an illusion in many cases.

Nilsson and Sunesson's use of the notion of a *context of use* builds on the work by the Austrian sociologist Helga Nowotny (1982). The complexity of the researchers' symbiotic relationship with the environment that provides them with work means that the knowledge is far from free from value judgments. Nilsson and Sunesson conclude:

This "context" or "environment" is not just a network of social relationships in general, but a nexus of conflicts, where states, organizations, scientific communities, departments, private companies and other scientists are all part of the picture. The structure of the conflicts is determined by social forces and organized interest groups. This "context of use" determines how knowledge and concepts are understood and used. (Nilsson and Sunesson 1990, p 114)

Sunesson also refers to a study by Thomas Brante, which shows that researchers (in this case they were working on a study concerning the referendum on nuclear power) are aware that the research of their opponents is tainted by personal bias, whereas they regard their own work as objective.

The definitions and notions used in current user research are criticized by Sunesson and Nilsson, who have analyzed how research is used and why (Nilsson and Sunesson 1990). They conclude that the uses to which research is put are even more dependent on context than what the literature shows. They found, for instance, that research results can be used in different ways by a town's administration depending on where in the hierarchy the user is situated. In Nilsson and Sunesson's study, office managers, union representatives and social workers sometimes used the very same research in three different ways.

In their analyses, they first identify four different strategies according to which research is used. The first, in which research is used as an investment for political ends, is called a *sociopolitical investment strategy* by Nilsson and Sunesson. The second one to emerge from their material is determined by the need to control both the research and the user's own organization, thus its name, the *control strategy*. The two additional, but less common strategies, are the *personnel-oriented investment strategy* and the *result-oriented strategy*. The latter means using research and researchers for the purpose of short-term campaigns.

The purpose of these studies of the uses of research is to *explore how the use affects the research itself*. Concerning the strategy that is the most productive for the research itself, i.e. the *sociopolitical investment strategy*, Sunesson observes that:

...it stimulates the demand for research and leads to the organizing of networks of researchers and users. In these cases, the organizations do not protect themselves by means of "buffers", but by allying

themselves with the research. These alliances are formed out of a need to control one's environment. In this way, both of the main investment strategies are power techniques, methods to connect and disconnect knowledge and power, which have a direct bearing on the research. (Nilsson and Sunesson 1990, p 123)

These alliances are not in themselves a problem. What is a problem, however, and what Sunesson discussed in his lecture at the Falun conference, is that there are only a few, *specific users* of research. It is just the *tip of society's hierarchical pyramid* that uses research in this way. Therefore, a monopoly forms on the use of contacts and knowledge, which has major repercussions on the research and its uses.

This model, which can also be seen as a method for building *networks*, is, for the most part, a good model to work with. An assessment of the *importance of networks* to the research community, and to some extent to research information, was presented by Hanne Foss Hansen (1990). Foss Hansen holds e.g. that more permanent networks between researchers and practitioners would lead to more long-term and constructive uses of research. The networks that she examines involve researchers, public administration and the private sector. Foss Hansen does not, however, address the problem of *the kind of knowledge* that is being used.

THE INFORMATION PROCESS. There were several papers submitted about the information process itself to the Falun conference. Marianne Gustavsson, secretary of information at the Work Environment Fund, describes how the Fund is able to reach different groups of users through its various channels of written information. The groups the Fund deals with most frequently are referred to by Gustavsson (1990) as "transmitting groups". As part of their jobs, these people sift through, select and distribute knowledge to union members and other appropriate people at their places of work. Transmitting groups include personnel in charge of company health care, safety and work environment inspectors, staff in charge of education as well as regional safety supervisors, central safety supervisors and union officials and representatives.

Gustavsson explains how the written information is complemented by conferences and seminars. One example of a "successful" initiative was the "Clean up" campaign. This campaign was evaluated by IPF (the Uppsala Institute for Personnel and Organizational Development). Gustavsson quotes from its report that "51% continued to work with the material after the conference" (p 49). It is far from clear what this really means, however. According to the IPF report (Hedlund et al 1990), only 17% of the people who answered the questionnaire (25 out of 144 individuals) were from the

cleaning staff. Out of 29 interviewees, two were cleaners. The main target group of the information campaign was also stated to be the supervisors, which corresponds to the general strategy of the Work Environment Fund (see above). The report gives no indication of the answers of the cleaners interviewed. There are, however, a few interesting answers from some of the interviewees who did not continue working with the material. Some said: "it works fine now, there is no reason to start changing things around" (Hedlund et al 1990, p 22). Another person claimed that the resistance to reform came mostly from the cleaning staff: "...they don't want to change their routines, to start working in cleaning patrols, for instance."

The authors of the report also conclude that it is important not to overestimate the effects of a campaign like this, where the object is to transmit knowledge "higher up" in the organisations. It is also true that this type of "evaluation" cannot be used to obtain any substantial knowledge about where the obstacles to reform are to be found. In addition, it should be noted that the researchers involved in the "Clean up" campaign were finished with their part of the project once they had compiled the material.

In a paper from the Norwegian Research Council for Science and the Humanities (Norges Allmennvitenskapelige Forskningsråd, NAVF), Karl Erik Brofoss examined whether results from research are really used. Brofoss focused on the importance of the channels used to transmit information. By compiling results from different studies, he concludes that the by far most important means of transmitting information is *direct contact with the researchers themselves* (Brofoss 1990, p 105). He gives no clear indication of how this contact is to be made, however:

It would not appear that the contact between researchers and users is established first and foremost at conferences. Furthermore, it seems unlikely that direct contact with the researchers increases the probability that the user groups will read the research reports. And most noteworthy of all, the fact that the users read the written material seems to have no bearing on whether or not they use the research... (Brofoss 1990, p 104)

In conclusion, Brofoss notes the importance of discussing the transmission strategies of the future.

Another concrete study that points in the same direction was undertaken by Ivar Söderlind and Lars Höglund (1990). Their work is about the contact between researchers and practitioners in the area of environmental protection and public health. In their conclusion, where the authors present their recommendations, they suggest, in addition to providing written

information in various forms, *increased contact between researchers and practitioners*. Söderlind and Höglund also emphasize the importance of weighing in *the social environment* of different groups when interpreting the results of information campaigns. One way to strengthen this aspect would be for the researchers to "go to where the practitioners are" to a greater extent. This would give them insight into the reality of the municipalities. According to Söderlind and Höglund, the researchers could accomplish this through observation, discussion, dialogue, and by providing guidance and help in understanding the results of their research, etc.

From the above summary it can be seen then that the oldest model for spreading information about research is starting to be challenged from different directions. Ulrich Nitsch, professor at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, has made a detailed study of campaigns to spread research information among farmers (an area that has been at the forefront of information transmission). According to Nitsch, the main criticism that can be levelled against past diffusion research is that its *perspective on the sender is too one-sided*. It was presumed in earlier research that the information the sender wanted to convey was good and should be conveyed. If it did not succeed according to plans, the researchers considered this a failing on the part of the target groups and tried to explain why the information had not been accepted and applied in terms of the target groups' shortcomings.

His own research at the Swedish University of Agriculture Sciences has prompted Nitsch to describe the meeting between the world of research and the farmers as a cultural collision:

Research information is based on a formal rationale and represents the values of the scientific community. The farmers, however, apply an adjustable rationale, determined by the conditions under which they live and work and the values that grow out of their practical, agricultural work.

...
In my opinion, it is crucial for the researchers to clarify the nature of this meeting and under which conditions and on whose terms it occurs. This kind of knowledge is necessary to ensure that the meeting can be designed so as to be enriching for both sides. There is a tendency in our society to ascribe higher dignity to scientific knowledge than to knowledge that springs from experience. Therefore, the transmission of research information risks being reduced to a confrontation, or a one-sided cultural invasion, rather than a fruitful exchange. This not

only reduces the effectiveness of the research information but also goes against our own democratic principles. (Nitsch 1990, p 90)

This view is completely different from asserting that the cleaning staff cannot be bothered to change their routines. It expresses a wish to take people seriously. It addresses the questions: *what kind of knowledge is to be conveyed, to whom and in what context, and maybe even why?* Only when we have provided satisfying answers to these questions can we proceed to take a closer look at how the transmission of information should be carried out.

It can be seen, therefore, that this problem is *essentially an educational concern*.

Research about Adult Education

In the discussion above about research on research information, I have highlighted the crucial role that education researchers play in this context, which for so long has been an interdisciplinary domain. When it comes to research about adult education, adult pedagogy, or andragogy, as it is sometimes known, the situation is almost the reverse, i.e. a more interdisciplinary approach is needed. Adult education is a subdivision of education and in some countries it has developed into its own discipline. In a recently published article, however, a Dutch educational researcher expounds on what he believes to be the disadvantages of an excessively narrow view of adult education (Tuijnman 1991). Tuijnman gives Sweden as a relatively good example of a country where the integration of adult education with other educational research has been particularly beneficial. The theories about *recurrent education* that were introduced in Sweden in the late 1960's, led to further integration with other social science research. This, according to Tuijnman, has meant that the research about adult education has found its own niche in a larger context of educational policy.

In June, 1990, a conference was held at the Nordic Folk Academy in Kungälv. The conference was called *Research in Scandinavia, First Annual Conference on Research in Popular Education and Adult Education*. It was arranged by the academy in cooperation with the research group on adult education at the University of Linköping. Many of the papers submitted to the conference support Tuijnman's argument, i.e. that this type of research belongs in a larger context of educational policy.

The summary that follows is my selection from the papers on *recurrent education* from a perspective of working life and the workplace.

The question of how to reach people with the lowest levels of education has cropped up repeatedly in Sweden. The debate gathered momentum particularly after the "Low Income Report" was presented. Lena Johansson's contributions (1974) were among the most insightful. At the time, recurrent education was a form of adult education, which was perceived as a means to bring about society's stated intention of achieving equality by means of education. Vast research resources were used to find (new) ways of reaching people with little education. The paper submitted by Anders Fransson and Staffan Larsson to this conference focuses on different ways to increase participation in adult education. The authors claim, however, that a general effort to promote education, any type of education, is not without its drawbacks:

...adult education may come to be perceived as an obligation, the same obligation that made many people uncomfortable about school. Sometimes adult education is more a question of propaganda than of education/increased knowledge, like in those advertisements for companies that pretend to be promoting further education. Even when it is a matter of "good" education, it is not self-evident that everybody should study. It is not always through organized schooling that we learn what we need to know. To place a high value on adult education is more an expression of the world view of certain adult education fanatics and higher education romantics than it is a general truth (Fransson and Larsson 1990, p 1).

In spite of these objections, the authors go on to present a series of arguments for the importance (and maybe even necessity) of education. It is crucial, however, that the education be imparted in the proper way and have the proper content. One of the reasons invoked for this, and which is of vital importance in this context, is that *the workplace is where we learn the meaning of power*. Without knowledge, we are often helpless and unable to increase our influence. Fransson and Larsson point out that the right kind of education can be a boost in strengthening a person's position in the workplace. Traditional training programs for the staff are not a viable alternative from this perspective, since they tend to be offered on the employers' terms and are very seldom available to those with the least amount of education (Larsson et al, 1986, LO 1989).

In addition to the powerlessness experienced at the workplace, some studies in the "Power Report" (Petersson et al 1989) show that "most measures of community involvement show a considerable correlation with the level of education." Petersson et al claim that:

To make new contacts, take the initiative, belong to organisations, be able to stand up to authority and other aspects of participation are much more prevalent among highly educated people than among those with little education (Petersson et al 1989, p 100).

It would seem, therefore, that the arguments for further education are strong enough to convince us to try our utmost to encourage more people to study. Fransson and Larsson also present ways in which this object can be achieved, on the basis of seven dimensions, where one pole represents active efforts to involve people with little education in adult education programs and the other stands for a more passive approach.

The seven dimensions are:

location – linking the education to the workplace seems to be an effective incitement

recruitment – it is important that the studies be based on everyday life in order to reach those with a "latent need to study"

a network of studies – here, different forms of cooperation between the adult education organizations, the secondary schools for adults, etc., are mentioned. *financing* – that the education be fully remunerated is a necessary condition for large groups of workers

hours – flexibility is the key word

group composition – the workmates are an ideal group in many ways

course content – according to current research about adult education, this should ideally be adjusted to the experience of the participants

One of the forms invoked by Fransson and Larsson as being close to the ideal is the research circle method, in their article represented by Eriksson and Holmer (1990).

Fransson and Larsson warn about the dangers inherent in studies tied to the workplace, mainly as concerns the content:

Who decides the content? How can free and independent knowledge be obtained in a course held at the workplace? This type of studies presupposes not only impartial organizers, but also an attitude on the part of the participants that independence is important (ibid, p 10)

They also point out that the trade unions must place more stringent demands on the education of their members in order to affect the content, form and, most importantly, the target group of the studies. Fransson and

Larsson conclude their article by stating, however, that 'there is an obvious risk in increasing the education programs at the workplace at the expense of the education that is available to all:

One common reason for choosing adult education is that you want to get away from a work situation that is perceived as meaningless or hazardous to your health. It is important that this possibility remain open to everyone. If it is possible to change jobs by means of further training, the employer will feel a natural pressure to improve poor work conditions, in order to maintain his labor force (ibid, p 11).

Far be it from me to deny anyone the possibility of changing jobs by means of further training, but the problem is that even if more people are educated this way, they are likely simply to leave the old jobs behind. New people are then taken on to fill these positions. In other words, the context stays the same. Fransson and Larsson hope that the employer will be forced to make changes in order to keep his workers, but this will be true only for some sectors, definitely not all. The only result will be the creation of transitional jobs or workplaces, where only people with a very low standing in society and with a poor self-image will remain (primarily women, immigrants, etc).

A more integrated view of work and education was presented in a Finnish paper submitted to the same conference. Within the framework of a large research program about continuing education, Jukka Tuomisto undertook a study of different workplaces in Finland. The aim of the study was to investigate the ideal conditions for a process of continuing learning. The introduction to Tuomisto's project deserves to be quoted in full:

a. The research on continuing learning cannot be limited to a mere discussion of a more flexible education system. It is just as important to analyze general and structural problems in working life as well as the matter of the distribution of work, which affect people's possibilities to advance in their work.

b. In addition to education, we need to examine all forms of learning that exist in working life. It is only through an analysis of the whole situation and by discussing the importance to the individual's career of different forms of learning, that we can build a new strategy for the ongoing learning process.

c. Behind the concept of continuing education there is always a normative view of man and society. The ongoing learning process can be justified just as well on the basis of the demands for effectiveness in production, as from a humanistic point of view, which would demand a more humane production process. The research should strive to ascertain to what extent the different aspects affect the development strategy in question. We must also examine to what degree these aspects are contradictory or if they can be combined, at least in part.

d. Education is also always a question of power. The old saying that "knowledge is power" is still viable, maybe today more than ever. In the information society, education and knowledge grow even more important as the source and instrument of power. If people's ability to go on learning is recognized and the attitudes to an ongoing learning process grow more enlightened, the hierarchy at the workplace will inevitably be affected. The employees must, consequently, be given increased access to co-determination and influence. If not, the ongoing learning strategy will be just a new tool for the employer to whip and manipulate his workers (Tuomisto 1990, p 10)

Tuomisto's ideas are based in part on the theories of a critical psychology of learning, which have become known in Sweden mainly through the work of Häyrynen and Hautamäki (1976). The basic aim here is to change the conditions and nature of the work, while at the same time engaging in a process of learning that increases the individual's ability to influence.

Jan Holmer's work "*Studying as an impetus for changing the nature of work*" (Holmer 1990) also owes something to these theories. He, too, stresses the importance of past experience in this context:

The qualifications that a person brings with him or her are a product of learning processes and are based on experiences that people share in their work, home, school, etc. The knowledge, skills and attitudes that a person gives expression to can be interpreted in the light of e.g. the conditions of a person's formative years, the degree of reproductive

work in the home and the position held in the production chain. (Holmer 1990, p 4)

In addition, Holmer is one of the few Swedish researchers who early on became interested in Negt's theories and developed them further (e.g. Holmer 1987).

Another perspective on what is largely the same problem is represented by Kenneth Abrahamsson (1990) in his discussion "Reflections on future development strategies for adult education in Scandinavia". Abrahamsson underscores the importance of strengthening Scandinavian cooperation in the area of adult education:

If not, our Scandinavian platform for adult education risks being lost in the large European transformation. We will either disappear in all the smoke and dust kicked up by the dramatic changes in Eastern Europe, or get left by the roadside in the drawn-out negotiations concerning our relationship to the European Community. (Abrahamsson 1990, p 1)

After having examined the process of life-long learning in Japan, where "time for learning and problem-solving at work" may account for as much as 10 to 20% of the working hours" (ibid, p 6), and in the United States, where a new form of education contracts are starting to be used in some companies, Abrahamsson warns of the danger of taking the problem of education at the workplace too lightly:

Could it be that the idea of learning at work is a way of gradually transferring and legitimizing the employer's power over society's store of knowledge and thereby also to control the individual's personal quest for learning and knowledge? These are some of the questions we should be asking ourselves when trying to determine the direction adult education should take in the new century. (ibid, p 10).

In conclusion, current educational research in adult education shows the necessity of linking questions of education and learning to the workplace and the problems of work. At the same time, however, it is essential that the education not be controlled by the employer, which would only serve to perpetuate existing conditions. The unions need to develop a strategy in order to safeguard all their members' interests more competently than they do now.

Research about the Study Circle Tradition

One form of adult education that has long enjoyed a very solid standing is the study circle. The special way of working that characterizes the study circle originated in the popular education movement and is a special form of adult education. Therefore, it can be claimed that the study circle is based on an educational theory of its own.

One of the early pioneers of the study circle was the well-known proponent of educational reform Oscar Olsson, who saw this as a valid method to put people's knowledge and experience to good use. Olsson claims that "the Order of Good Templars was the first major popular organization which tried to launch a general educational program for its members" (Olsson 1922, p 1). Olsson refers to the courses of study that were designed in 1895 "along the lines of the Anglo-American Good Templars". There had been, however, long before that, pre-union initiatives to start "educational circles". Bunny Ragnerstam (1986) has described how two tailor's apprentices, along with a doctor, drew up a formal announcement of the formation of the *Educational Circle of Stockholm*, on October 26, 1845. Although Ragnerstam's description is in the form of a novel, it is based on extensive research. Not until the founders learned, on October 28, that their circle had been approved, did they, according to Ragnerstam:

... dare to issue an open invitation to all the artisans of Stockholm to join their circle as of the New Year. This was the first organization in the country, outside the framework of the guilds, that was created *by the workers and for the workers*, with the intent of gathering together workers of all professions in one and the same movement, *to achieve a common goal.* (Ragnerstam 1986, p 15)

The fact that the workers, apprentices Olof Renhult and Sven Trädgårdh, needed a doctor to help them, was, according to Ragnerstam, due to the fact that although this was "the era of associations", with innumerable organizations being formed, there was not yet a single organization for workers. Therefore, the apprentices were worried about how their idea would be received. They had been inspired by talking to foreign apprentices and those returning from abroad, who related that in Germany, France, Switzerland and England such organizations had been around for quite some time. They also learned that organizations for worker education had been introduced in Hamburg and other places. These examples made them persist in their endeavour. Although the beginnings were auspicious from the workers' point of view, with a democratic form, the organization was soon appropriated by "the royalistic gentlemen of the bourgeoisie." On May

17, new statutes that eliminated membership democracy were introduced. Ragnerstam describes this as follows:

Instead, the board of directors gained absolute control of the circle by abolishing the members' right to vote and replacing it with a 24-member council that would make all the decisions. After that, the circle gradually turned into a forum for the philanthropic activities of the middle class, which attempted to diffuse middle-class culture and middle-class education among the lower classes. (ibid, p 77)

In an article in *Uppsalademokraten* on August 9, 1990 (Bulow 1990), on the controversial ban on strikes introduced in the spring of that year, Ragnerstam refers in an interview to "the dissolution of the first workers' movement". It is precisely these first study circles that he has in mind. Ragnerstam adds something that is also highly relevant to today's research circles and their content:

When the values of the middle class start to penetrate, the original ideals and visions are spoiled. (Bulow 1990, p 4)

When Oscar Olsson writes about the early study circles of the Order of Good Templars, his main concern is with the circles that evolved over time. The very first courses were not shining examples of "a good learning environment." Instead, Olsson concludes about these circles that "grown men and women will not in the long run be content with the elementary nature of the courses". He goes on to say that the courses that were really successful were ones that "had an altogether different character" (Olsson 1922, p 2).

Here, Olsson is referring to a form of study circle that originated in *Skåne* and *Värmland*:

After working for many years with organizing courses in Lund, the director of studies for the district of Skåne proposed in 1902 to his district and to the central office that a new organization form should be introduced, the *study circle*. It was accepted at both levels. The Skåne director had the opportunity of experimenting with the new form for a couple of years, first in Skåne and later on in Värmland. At that time, almost all of the existing study circles – some twenty – were limited to those

two areas. After that, however, the circles spread all over the country and in another few years, the number of circles started to increase by an average of one hundred a year. (ibid, p 3)

A study circle as it was defined in those days was not allowed to be about just anything. Olsson defines the study circle as follows:

The study circle is first and foremost a library organization, but also a reading circle, a lecture society and a club for social enjoyment. In addition, it can easily, under favorable conditions, be combined with studies. The work methods used are easy to adapt to local conditions almost anywhere. (ibid)

One important function of the first study circles was to "add more substance to people's lives, by bringing them into contact with the treasures of art and learning" (Ibid, p 23). In this way, the concerns of every-day existence and people's drinking habits were to be pushed into the background. A certain amount of control was certainly part of the picture, as evidenced by the criteria laid down for a good circle leader. Such a person had to be interested in his work, persevering and punctual.

Olsson goes on to discuss many different types of circles. He mentions for example the folk high school variety, which, according to him, really lived up to the name of study circle. Another type that he refers to is one that he came across in the British adult education system, namely the university tutorial class. He labels this the "scientific study circle" or "university circle". This kind of circle is described more in detail by Olsson in his book *The University and Adult Educational Activities in Sweden* (Olsson 1925). This type of circle had a maximum of 30 members, who committed themselves to meeting once a week for a total of three years. The university provided a professor or an associate professor who lectured for the first hour, and then led a discussion among the members during the second hour. In Sweden, two such circles were started in 1922. One in Stockholm, headed by Professor Gösta Bagge, and the other in Malmö, under the direction of Emil Sommarin¹. While Olsson's book was being written, a third circle started in Malmö. Olsson mentions R. H. Tawney in England as one of the trail-blazers in developing new teaching methods suitable for the meeting between mature and more experienced students and the university world. Olsson also points out the mutual benefits afforded by this meeting between the university and the workers. Another important point, in Olsson's view, was

¹ Both Bagge and Sommarin were economists who took an interest in worker-related issues. It is interesting to note, in this context, that both were politically active. Sommarin was a social-democrat, whereas Bagge was active in the Conservative Party!

that it was very clear from the start that the workers' higher education would not make them anything other than workers: "...they, still in their capacity of manual laborers, did this to be better armed in the struggle to liberate their class" (Olsson 1925, p 4).

It can be seen then that the study circle as a form goes a long way back, but, as with so many other study forms, the content has varied considerably, as has the leadership and the aim of the circles. It may have been more unusual than what has previously been assumed for the circles to have had any sort of *emancipatory* goal. This may be an instance of wishful thinking, rather than actual reality.

That the form as such has many built-in benefits is beyond question. The only problem is that, as with many other educational forms, the *structure has altered the original intentions*. In a paper submitted to the conference, Jan-Erik Perneman, of the Nordic Folk Academy in Kungälv, and Bosse Bergstedt, trace the history of the study circle and outline its benefits, but also examine the problems that characterize today's practical activities.

Among the positive aspects of the study circle, Bergstedt and Perneman point out that the adult education movement holds that each individual's experience constitutes a higher criterion of truth than the *experts' scientific methods*.

If it turns out that there is no final and absolute truth, more people must be given the opportunity to express themselves. The remarkable thing about this view is that the view itself is a result of this openness, i.e. that different perspectives and points of view can come together to provide a fuller picture of the many-facetted whole. (Bergstedt and Perneman 1990, p 8)

The authors also stress the fact that this form of adult education is in many ways unique to the Scandinavian countries and that it should be safeguarded. It is rooted in a popular struggle to learn about what is viewed as important and to discern contexts and patterns in order to be able to understand and influence. Throughout the years, the study circle has helped many people bolster their self-confidence and learn to see themselves as members of a community as well as to increase their awareness about the world around them. This, in turn, has made them more involved in the development of society, according to Bergstedt and Perneman.

At the same time, the authors claim that there are dangers inherent in institutionalizing this study form:

The ideological awareness of the origins and purpose of the popular education movement is easily blurred by external forms. A person who has not felt the need to study can easily be misled into assuming the role of leader or teacher and may believe that the point is to transmit a pre-packaged form of knowledge.

The goal of popular education is precisely the opposite - to create knowledge out of the collective experience. (ibid, p 10)

Perneman also refers to Bosse Bergstedt's study of courses organized by an adult education organization (1988), where a double reality clearly starts to emerge. This consists of an explicit interest in freedom, on the one hand, and, on the other, a control function that is kept in place by means of the organization's rules and regulations.

The members gain a certain sense of freedom through the social life "within the framework of the circle". In other words, a direct, open relationship often develops among the people who are participating.

It would appear, then, that the social dimension works well. The same cannot be said for the participants' interpretation of knowledge, the transmission of knowledge and the creation of knowledge:

Knowledge is perceived as something independent of everything else, something to be transmitted or conveyed. It is as though there existed a store of knowledge, from which you could supply yourself, almost as when you go shopping at the supermarket. This view serves to create a distance between yourself as a living human being and the knowledge. There is no give-and-take between a person's social life and knowledge. (ibid, p 12)

Bergstedt and Perneman conclude their discussion of adult education and the notion of knowledge by outlining the consequences that an integrated point of view will have on "popular research":

This process is central to popular education. It means putting your experiences into words, converting everyday knowledge into a generalized understanding of the world and always maintaining

an open dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious.

How is this approach part of the research process?

Popular research means putting your own culture into words and giving it expression in different ways. This is important in academic research too! (ibid, p 13)

We may conclude, then, that the study circle method has deep roots in the Swedish popular education movement. The content and direction of the study circle, however, have not been discussed often enough.

Conclusion

Based on this review of the research and discussions about research information, adult education and study circles, it is clear that not in any of these areas are the stated goals being met.

Based on the work that has been done on *research information*, it is obvious that there is no such thing as a method to *transmit* "scientific knowledge". The problem lies both in the *form* of knowledge acquisition and in the *content* of the knowledge to be transmitted. A society that claims to be, at least in some respects, democratic, ought to be interested in posing serious questions about research and research information; questions like: *what kind of knowledge* should be transmitted to *whom* and *why*, and eventually also *how*?

From the available research on *adult education*, we see that there are important advantages in linking education to the workplace. For productive learning situations to occur, it is important that this education be beyond the control of the employer. If it is not, it will always be a question of adjusting the labor force to changes based on short-term economic gain. The unions should instead advocate a strategy based on an established plan, whereby the education is rooted in the day-to-day conditions of the members. Such a strategy is also more advantageous to society in the long term.

The view of the *study circle* as a forum for building knowledge is not new, but this idea has sometimes been misused and applied in a rigid context. Clearly, a form of adult education is needed where people are truly engaged in the process of putting their own experience into words and letting their everyday knowledge form the basis of a general understanding of the world. A re-establishment of the original kind of study circle is therefore called for.

In conclusion, it is necessary to revitalize all of the above-mentioned areas if the original and fundamental intentions are ever to be fulfilled. There is a clear need for forms and contexts with a less narrow view of knowledge.

The Research Circle as an Instrument of Change

The kinds of questions I have raised above are the same that researchers in different fields have been asking for years. More work by these researchers would in fact help complete the picture of what a research circle is and what it could be. From an international perspective, there are many similarities with the field of research known as PAR (Participatory Action Research). In Sweden, an anthology published by Jan Holmer and Bengt Starrin (1993) helped spark new interest in this area. In their work, Holmer and Starrin also give a brief introduction to the research circle as method. On an ideological level, there are many parallels between the research circle and those versions of PAR described and advocated by Orlando Fals-Borda and Muhammad Anisur Rahman (1991) and Patricia Maguire (1987). The origins of the research circle, however, as well as the historical and practical factors that helped bring it into existence, are specifically Swedish or Scandinavian. I have therefore limited my discussion here to a few Scandinavian works that are important for understanding the research circle.

Related Projects

A number of researchers associated with the Methodology Project in the Center for Working Life presented their findings in 1981:

There is an ongoing discussion of both the problems and the possibilities inherent in cooperation among researchers, unions and other parties, e.g. the interplay between action and ideas, between practice and theory, the necessary conditions for a long-term acquisition of knowledge, the limits of local influence and the possibilities of overcoming those limits. (Sandberg, 1981, dust jacket)

In his introduction to this work, Åke Sandberg states that the collective experience from the action research program led the research group to formulate two demands for continued research.

One was based on the need for *long-term research* consisting of both *independent and generalizing research about society and the development of technical/organizational alternatives*.

The second demand concerned the *design* of this long-term research. Both in *form* and in *content*, it should be designed in such a way as to eventually *support* people's needs to control their own lives, their needs for *democratization* – an action approach.

Unfortunately, it cannot be claimed that Sandberg's appeal led to a massive outpouring of research or progress in the direction he recommended. There are, however, attempts being made here and there to link existing types of knowledge in order to promote change. Independent, long-term research about society with this ultimate objective have, up until now, been relatively modest in scope. The examples cited below are just that, *attempts* at research aimed at change.

In Luleå, a project is under way to vitalize *local efforts to improve working conditions*. L.O. Eriksson (1988) has summed up some of these experiences. His argument is based on the linking together of, in his words, "at least two" different kinds of collective knowledge. First, is the *total knowledge which has been conquered by research and science throughout the ages*, i.e. knowledge in the conventional use of the term. Second, he focuses on *the knowledge of everyday life* and the experiences that grown men and women have acquired in their daily lives, at work and in their contact with nature. The educational process that he helps set in motion is described as follows:

A person's new-found information is converted into knowledge when he or she critically examines it in relation to what is already known. This type of knowledge leads to people who, based on their values and needs, seek out new knowledge for a specific reason. This process does not preclude a traditional quest for knowledge, but the collection of knowledge is geared towards concrete problem-solving and is therefore, by definition, more conducive to change. Hence, the knowledge of everyday life serves to make people better prepared to enter into an active relationship with things new and unknown. In local projects to improve working life, a higher value should be placed on the powerful resource represented by the employees' collective knowledge of everyday life. It ought to be made visible and shared with others. (Eriksson 1988, p 45)

A strong faith in the "collective knowledge of everyday life" can be seen to be the most important aspect of Eriksson's work.

The view prevailing within the field of *sociopolitical research* is also based on a faith in people's ability to change their situation through a mutual effort. This has long existed as a counterbalance to the notion that the authorities know best. A recently completed project in Skiftingshus in the small Swedish town of Eskilstuna is a prime example of this view. In their essay on the project, Apelmo and Ekermo conclude:

In the processes triggered by this project, local knowledge and experience played a decisive role. At the same time, there was another kind of knowledge and experience unrelated to the local situation in Skiftinge. This knowledge existed (and still exists) in books and reports and in the form of experts who came and lectured. The project leaders took it upon themselves to bring in and introduce different types of general knowledge in the local work. In this way, the local point of view met with other points of view, not uncritically, but in a process of evaluating what could be valid and useful in the local work. (Apelmo and Ekermo, 1989, p 13)

Another example of how people's own experiences can be a useful starting point in gaining a *perspective on historical and societal contexts* comes to us from Denmark. In Århus, Kirsten Folke Harrits and Ditte Scharnberg have been busy for some ten years collecting, documenting and disseminating the life stories of workers (see e.g. Harrits and Scharnberg 1988). For our purposes here, the most interesting aspect of their work is that it developed into a form of adult education, where the participants' own experiences constituted the educational material in a learning situation (Harrits and Scharnberg 1989). The memories the participants share with one another, "den lille historie", is processed and linked with History, "den store historie", in such a way as to create a historical awareness:

each participant learns both to see herself or himself as a link in the evolutionary chain of the working class, and to recognize that a given situation is changeable. (Harrits and Scharnberg 1989, p 245)

By using this method, Harrits and Scharnberg hope to be able to put into practice the conditions that e.g. Negt (see below) focused on, but failed to indicate precisely how to reach. Another point of interest in their work is that they address unskilled workers, both men and women of varying ages. They describe their work in these groups as extremely stimulating on an educational level, since it is among the unskilled that we see the largest gap between the participants' actual intellectual resources and the time spent in formal education. This type of educational process, i.e. with a content that is relevant to the participants, therefore yields quick results, which is noticeable also to the participants themselves.

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40.

Examples of Research Circles

General comments

As I have shown above, there are a number of different examples of educational forms that have developed out of the same views of society, knowledge and man as those espoused by the research circle. At the Center for Working Life (ALC) seminar in February, 1990, it became clear that the number of research circles was growing. Many researchers presented exciting results. It is true, however, that the term "research circle" is used to designate circles that have *different aims*, especially depending on where in the country they are located. The report (ALC 1990) that was compiled from the papers submitted to the ALC shows the main centers for researchers involved in research circles to be Lund, Karlstad and Uppsala. The universities in these towns appear to have developed traditions that differ somewhat among themselves.

It is impossible for me here and now to provide a highly detailed description or summary of all the different research circles that have existed or are currently being held. Such a summary is available in the ALC report. An exhaustive compilation and evaluation of all research circles in Sweden would be a project in itself, although a well-needed one. What I can provide here is a series of brief glimpses of past and present conditions that characterize different parts of the country and refer you to articles on them.

In Lund, where the work on research circles originated, the point of departure was to organize university courses for union activists. The special conditions that characterized the work in these circles were fraught with educational possibilities, which prompted Karl-Axel Nilsson to develop a form that he labelled the *research circle* (in the early stages, the expression "research-linked circle" was used, see Nilsson 1990). During the fifteen years that these activities have been going on in Lund, a large number of circles have started on different topics. "Practitioners" that have participated include representatives from both the Swedish Trade Union Confederation (LO), the Central Organization of Salaried Employees (TCO) and, to a lesser extent, the Swedish Confederation of Professional Associations (SACO). In a couple of these circles (see e.g. Svenning 1984 and 1988), not all of the participants were even union members. Such factors obviously affect work methods and content. There has been extensive documentation of the Lund circles (see e.g. Nelson 1987 and Göransson 1988 for a summary). Unfortunately, the activity in Lund has slowed down significantly in recent years.

The activities in Karlstad were launched by the 1982 TREFF project (Three-Way cooperation Researchers and Unions, i.e. the LO and TCO districts, and

the University, see Eriksson et al 1984 and Eriksson 1986), but they were also closely linked to the Bergslagen project (Berger and Eriksson 1987).

When the TREFF project concluded, the contact between the TCO district and the university ceased. According to Birgitta Eriksson (1990), however, this relationship was renewed in the fall of 1987, when a part-time position for a union contact secretary (between TCO and the university) was created. The LO district, too, was assigned a part-time contact researcher. In addition, the LO district engaged a full-time researcher, something which is unique among all the LO districts in Sweden. Apart from these resources, researchers are taken on for various projects. The Värmland LO district has also held courses to train research circle leaders (Eriksson 1989), reportedly in order to meet the large local needs for research circles. Furthermore, there is extensive work being done here, both on a theoretical and a practical level, in the area of participatory research (see Lundberg and Starrin 1990), where practitioners participate in the research as a matter of course.

In the early 1980's, the regional administration of the Uppsala university region met with representatives from the LO districts and a few from the TCO organizations. Out of this dialogue resulted a university course in business administration for union representatives, which was offered at different university localities in the region over the next few years. The need for other types of cooperation, including research circles, was also discussed at this time. After some preparation, including an evaluation of the Lund experience, an experimental project with research circles was started in the spring of 1984 (see Holmstrand 1986).

Up until the summer of 1994, some 30 research circles had been initiated in the Uppsala region, with participants from both LO and TCO. Since 1988, Uppsala University has been employing a part-time union contact secretary, who is in charge of the entire region. This position, which is held by a researcher from the department of education, was created and is funded by Uppsala University. Another result of the local cooperation activities is a research program that was started in 1992, ALFOFAK (the Swedish acronym is short for Working Life Research based on the Knowledge Needs of the Trade Unions). ALFOFAK is a natural extension of the discussions that arose from the work with research circles.

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The ALFOFAK Research Program

The interdisciplinary ALFOFAK research program is sponsored by the Work Environment Fund and headquartered at the Uppsala University department of education. In addition to educational researchers, ALFOFAK engages researchers in economic history, history, sociology, cultural geography and business administration. Both LO and TCO are actively involved, with union representatives from six different counties in central Sweden.

Over the several years of cooperation, the researchers have noted a considerable need for self-examination and a large interest in seeking out new knowledge on the part of the trade unions. Within a traditional framework, we researchers have little chance of satisfying the increasing demand for research information and for producing new knowledge through research. Hence, the ALFOFAK research program consists of several study levels, where the unions' needs for knowledge always determine the nature of the contribution from the research side. This work is currently characterized by a process, where the participants complement and support each other and where new knowledge and new approaches are created little by little.

The project/program is based on the following three basic conditions:

- (1) The research is based on cooperation between unions and researchers before, during and after the actual research work. This means that the research results are handed over to the unions on an ongoing basis. The research circle is used as an important model for cooperation.
- (2) Researchers from different disciplines participate, which means that problems and issues can be attacked from many different angles.
- (3) The central region of Sweden constitutes the geographical area within which the cooperation is taking place and the research is being carried out.

The advantages of this type of research can be summarized as follows:

- * *the research is based on real problems*
- * *there are many participants*
- * *different types of knowledge and experience are brought into play*
- * *access to information is ensured*
- * *the results are useful and can be disseminated immediately*

My Personal Experiences

In order to be able to present some preliminary analyses further on in this work on the basis of the theories presented here, I need to give a brief description of the two circles I have worked in. Both were held for women with low-status jobs. One was called "the girls in the canteen" and one was for cleaning women. The groups have several characteristics in common. *Firstly*, they have the same employer, the county council of Västmanland, and the same workplace, the Salberga special hospital in Sala.

Secondly, the participants in both circles consisted of only women. In the canteen circle, there were seven kitchen assistants and cooks (out of approximately 40 employees), while the cleaning circle consisted of ten cleaning women (including one supervisor). All the employees of the cleaning center participated in this circle. The low status that clings to these jobs, especially because they are at Salberga (an old hospital which in the past was used to confine the mentally handicapped), was an important factor in the circle work.

Thirdly, the circles were initiated by SKAF's division 37 in Sala, which for many years has been trying in different ways to persuade the employer to recognize the existing problems and to correct them. All the participants of the circles belonged to SKAF, but their involvement and interest in the union had been relatively low, a factor that I will discuss more later on. The union ombudsmen from the division participated in the circle work when they had time and when the participants thought it desirable.

A *fourth* common factor was that the circle work was carried out during work hours. The main contribution from the research side was my own, in my capacity as educational researcher.

The Canteen

The canteen circle, which started in the fall of 1988, spanned over some 20 sessions. The work has now been suspended. The proposals for change that arose from this circle concern the majority of the employees in the canteen and in the wards. The work to inform the employees about these changes began right after the circle started, but since the hospital is constantly being restructured (see below), there have been considerable coordination problems.

One major task of the circle was to chart the work situation for the women in the canteen. This was done with the help of photographs taken by the women themselves and careful documentation of the work process hour by hour for an entire day. The most visible result of this was an exhibition on

screens where the participants described their work in detail through written accounts and photographs. The exhibition revealed the vast professional knowledge held by the workers (knowledge which is largely ignored in the daily work), as well as the heavy lifting and the monotonous tasks involved in canteen work. In addition to showing the harshness of the conditions, the exhibition also conveyed the women's deep-felt professional pride.

A less noticeable result of the documentation compiled in the circle was that the handles on the stove lids were moved. The lids above the large frying grills are supposed to be closed in case there is a fire on the grill. The handles to close the lids are situated *directly above the grill*. When the participants realized that all the grills on the market are of this same design, they themselves took the initiative to have the handles moved to one side. Now, an "idea folder" is kept in the canteen containing this and other suggestions for technical improvements, which may interest inventors of new technology.

Another of these minor improvements consists of a lego board that shows how the canteen employees can expect to work for the coming three-week period. In the past, they would find out what they would be doing only when they arrived at work in the morning. In addition, a half-hour session is included every week for all the staff to meet in "set groups".

By carrying out well-planned *field trips* to the hospital wards that the canteen caters to as well as to other canteens and the training school for canteen employees in Uppsala, the participants learned more about their own work. For several of these field trips, they prepared their own well-thought-out questions.

A visit to SAS Catering at Arlanda airport gave cause for much reflection. The shockingly inferior working conditions that the circle members met with here instilled in them a permanent distrust of bright, cheerful messages from private entrepreneurs who claim they want to improve the work environment in the public sector. Administrators often hire private consultants to effect changes for municipal or county council employees. The participants knew of another such example in a nearby county.

In a more long-term perspective, the "girls in the canteen" became noticeably more interested in union work after the circle. Through the field trips we went on during the first stage of the circle, the participants started to realize that their work conditions were shared by others. While there were some workplaces that offered tips and ideas for improvement, there were also places where the conditions were much worse. To see, meet with and talk to others in similar situations helped change the participants' view of

their own conditions. They realized that they need to join forces and make a major, mutual effort to bring about any real improvements.

The Cleaning Center

The main reason the union ombudsmen took the initiative to start this circle was the cleaning staff's unbearable work situation, with recurrent work injuries in the form of aches, stiffness, etc. In the early stages of the circle, we therefore spent a lot of time *charting the work and giving a detailed description of how it is actually done*. After this process, each and everyone had become an expert in her own field. Since the cleaning center's entire staff participated in the circle (during working hours), the cleaning had to wait, which meant more work on other days.

Each participant gave an account of her work situation over the last few years and described the way it had been at the start of the circle. All these accounts coincided in their view that the work had gradually deteriorated and gotten more stressful and heavier after a reorganization in 1986. At that time, the intensity of the cleaning work decreased (from each day to every second or third day) and the areas of responsibility expanded. The new distribution of work was carried out by a newly hired cleaning inspector and was based on the standards of Spri (Swedish Institute for Health Services Development). The women had no say whatsoever in these calculations or in the distribution of areas. Nevertheless, they were very interested in finding out how the decisions were made, so they invited the cleaning inspector to come and explain his results to them. At the same time, we requested material from Spri in order to do our own calculations. In addition to material for time planning, Spri recommended a number of magazine articles, books, etc. on more recent approaches to cleaning. The institute also informed us that the old norms were no longer valid.

The meeting with the cleaning inspector did not afford much insight into the calculations. Not only that, but our own calculations showed that the time allotted to do the work was too short. There was, for instance, no time set aside for emptying waste baskets, getting from one building to another, etc. At the same time, the overwhelming time pressure was what had caused almost all of the cleaning women to develop work-related injuries of one kind or another. This is how some of the employees described their situation:

During the first four hours, the work area varies depending on if anyone is out sick or not. The last hour, we clean the large exercise room (three times a week) and the wood shop (twice a week). The exercise room is difficult because the floors are old and not well kept. It's often messy with a lot of equipment in the way.

I now suffer from aches in my arms, legs and feet. In 1982, I developed eczema (which was classified as a work injury). The only help I've gotten is free ointment!

Starting in December of that year (1986), we spent the full six hours cleaning every day. This included cleaning the canteen. Shortly afterwards, I began to experience pain in my shoulders. It started when I got home from work and got worse during the night. In 1988, the cleaning staff had a routine check-up. At that time, I was put on sick leave full-time and I've been out ever since. I've tried to train to go back to do the same work (or work full time as a nurse's aid), but it hasn't worked out. I've got pain in my shoulders, neck and arms. Sometimes my right hand goes numb. During this time, I've gone to the company doctor to have my sick leave extended every two months. The only treatment I've had is physical therapy for a total of four weeks. The doctors tell me that the pain-killers are the only help they can give me.

I've been working at Salberga since October, 1970. I started out working four hours a day and then switched to full-time in 1979. I'm the only full-time cleaning woman right now. I clean 47 offices, the coffee rooms, the rest rooms, the stairways, the machine room, the basement, etc. The long corridors are difficult to clean because they are seldom empty. Another problem is the big heavy furniture that can't be moved. The offices are filled with cords, shoes, boxes, etc. We also have to unlock and lock a lot of doors (no allowance was made for this in the calculations, my comment). I'm under a lot of pressure in the morning (work starts at 6 a.m.) to finish as many offices as possible while they're still empty. The afternoons are calmer. This makes for an uneven work situation. I have aches in my shoulders and hip. My left leg hurts after I get half-way through the day. I've also had a blood-clot in my leg a long time ago and now the leg gets swollen and "can't keep up". The doctors tell me there's nothing to be done. According to a radiologist (who took X-rays), it would be possible to operate. When I rest,

my leg gets better. After the heavy scrubbing, is when it's worst.

From the beginning, the circle members were determined to look for good examples of better work conditions, since they were sure that they were worse off than most others. One workplace that had been discussed in the media was "AB MOPP & SÖPP", a cleaning firm located in the neighboring town of Gävle. A field trip revealed that most of the changes that had been made there were purely cosmetic: more cheerful uniforms, some good machines, a different company spirit and rehabilitation of the people who suffered from work-related injuries (but no preventive health care). The circle members were looking for completely different and much more substantial solutions.

Other workplaces that we visited included the County Labor Board (LAN) in Malmö and the University in Umeå (Burhoim 1988a and 1988b). Here, too, some improvements had been implemented, but for various reasons they were inappropriate to use as models for our own work. Nevertheless, by learning about other people's work conditions, the members of the circle realized that the problems are universal, even if they sometimes look slightly different on the surface. The situation as such is what they share with other people and in this awareness they found the strength to keep on going.

The work-related injuries that the women suffered from made us interested in making ergonomical improvements in the cleaning habits. This initiative, which was mine, met with great suspicion, however. The reason was that the physical therapist at the hospital had given them some "good advice", e.g. to "dance with the mop", something they were unable to appreciate. Because of the time pressure they were under, they felt it impossible to give any consideration to how they moved. And just how do you go about dancing with your mop in an area that is a few square yards and littered with chairs, boxes, binders, shoes, etc?

Through one of the articles we obtained from Spri (Örtengren 1988), we were able to contact a researcher who had a wider perspective on the problem and who helped us draw up a list of conditions that needed to be fulfilled to achieve an over-all improvement in the work environment. This researcher (a professor of industrial ergonomics) attended one of our sessions, where, in addition to suggesting more far-reaching measures, he explained how important it was to make the right movements, take short breaks, etc. In a larger context, the value of such knowledge is enhanced.

MANAGEMENT AND UNION. We ended up, then, with many good suggestions and tips from different quarters on how to create our own

model for how the work at the cleaning center could be carried out in a way that was satisfying to all parties. The constant resistance and lack of interest from the employer sometimes made us despair, however. For years, the cleaning women had been fighting a losing battle when it came to getting more time to do their work, information about the chemicals they were using in their work, gaining a perspective on their work conditions, etc. There are even several recent examples of how the work environment has deteriorated. For instance, the personnel cafeteria has been refurbished. It looks nice, it is just that the chairs cannot be placed on top of the tables, because this would damage the surface of the new tables.

This is what the supervisor has to say about the last few years:

Working as a supervisor has been nothing but trouble from the very beginning. The reorganization changed everything for the worse. When we bring different problems to the attention of the cleaning inspector, we get no reaction. Lately, I've been trying to get help from the union instead.

The cleaning women were used to always hearing from a higher level in the organization about plans to save and reorganize, cutbacks, etc. Because of the highly conventional hierarchical attitudes that characterize the entire hospital establishment, the cleaning women saw no way to improve their situation. They were also afraid that their operation would be offered to a private company instead, if they put up too many demands.

As the supervisor indicated above, the cleaning staff turned to their union ombudsmen for help in solving their problems. Since these representatives received much the same treatment from the hospital management, however, the women's faith in the ability of the local union to change things started to falter.

The circle members repeatedly raised the question of how their groups are represented in the labor movement as a whole. At the section meetings, their situation was never, or hardly ever, discussed. They were the last to benefit from wage hikes and they were usually unable to feel that they had any part in the decisions that were made. "We're not allowed to go on strike, either", they would sometimes say when things looked particularly bleak.

At the workplace, the union representatives do a good job of involving the members in education programs, union courses, etc. Although some of these activities are seen as interesting, it is clear that they do not correspond to the needs of these groups, which consist exclusively of women. In both circles, we discussed the importance of the union to individual members and tried to approach this question from a wider perspective. What could the union do to make the work more meaningful to its members and

stimulate them to take an active part in union activities? In order for the interests of all union members to be safeguarded, the members themselves need to get involved.

It is feasible that these women would be more active if the content of the meetings and the language of the courses were altered and if a wider range of topics than just the terms of employment and wages was discussed. Subjects that the participants proposed included child care (opening hours at daycare centers, etc.) and questions dealing with codetermination and education. It is obvious that women represent a large, untapped potential for increased knowledge and change. Another important point that was raised was that all the work mates need to get involved. If some of them are absent to attend courses or participate in organs for cooperation, etc, this must not be viewed as unfair privileges. These tasks concern all of them and must have the support of the group as a whole - maybe the women should always participate in these activities two at a time, so that no one is tempted to shy away from the responsibility. We want to keep working on this problem, which was one shared by both groups, to be able to contribute to innovative solutions and reforms in the labor movement. One step in this direction was the invitation we extended to LO's "expert on women's issues", Boel Carlsson. She attended a session where the members of both circles (and other interested canteen workers) participated.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CHANGE. In the cleaning circle, we worked out a proposal to change the cleaning center into a model workplace. The object of our proposal was to make the center completely autonomous and let the cleaning women take full responsibility for the budget. Estimates have shown that absence due to work-related injuries is so costly that the staff could be increased by two full-time positions and show a profit if these ailments could be eliminated in the long term. In their new program, the cleaning women have allocated the time needed for cleaning different areas, based on their own experience. The total number of working hours includes a half-hour joint planning session every day to allow the workers to divide up the work, order products, discuss vacations, etc. Time is also set aside for obligatory participation in an exercise program twice a week, as well as for education and training for all the workers, according to the guidelines issued by LO (i.e. 19 days a year).

Primarily, the cleaning women wanted education in the following areas:

1. *More basic knowledge about their own special field*, to allow them to strengthen their position in various "cooperation groups". This includes knowledge about e.g. floor products, furniture, chemicals, new cleaning methods, etc. One very modest request that was expressed was the desire to attend cleaning fairs, etc., to keep abreast of new developments in the field.

2. *Budget.* More than just a general course in budgeting, this information would focus specifically on budget issues from the cleaning crew's point of view, e.g. estimates on wear and tear in case of poor cleaning routines, etc.
3. *Computers.* Training in how to use computers. This course too must be adapted to meet the special needs of the cleaning center.
4. A special *introductory course* for new employees should be designed.
5. When *all* the employees have received the instruction listed under points 1 - 3 above, they go on to study ergonomics, Swedish, etc.

A meeting was held to present proposal to the hospital director, an administrator, a nurse from the personnel health center and a politician (social-democrat). To start with, all of them claimed to be very positive to the work that had been done, without (as was only to be expected) making any concrete promises. In spite of their professed good will, their reaction was one of critical reserve. When the new time schedule for cleaning was introduced, the hospital director said: "What do you think the County Council Confederation will say if you do not follow the Spri guidelines? That could spread to other workplaces. The rules are there to be followed".

When we pointed out the need to include time for exercising, education, etc., he said: "It would have helped if you had thought of a way to finance this, too". The estimates that showed the staggering costs of work-related injuries were not considered interesting, since this new source of capital would not be readily available. Our plan for educating all the workers also came under criticism. In this case, it was the administrator who said that he would like to "send the supervisor on a course" so that she would be better able to manage the crew. When the cleaning women emphasized how important it was that all the employees have access to education, and mainly specific knowledge about cleaning problems, he seemed quite offended.

We left the meeting with one question lingering in our minds: Long-term solutions to improve stressful work conditions do not seem to interest the county council administrators - are these people trying to create more patients for their hospital?

THE CIRCLE CONTINUES The research circle has met sporadically after this meeting, mostly because it was felt that this contact was needed to keep up the women's spirits and commitment to change. This was necessary for several reasons, first and foremost because of a demand to cut operating costs for all county councils by 25%. At this time, SKAF did not agree to any cutbacks in the cleaning centers. Instead, the circle presented another proposal aimed at combining the cleaning with education at a county college. (This was a way to lengthen the total working hours and make the

work less monotonous, etc.) At the same time, the union demanded better equipment and the possibility to exercise during work hours.

It is interesting to note that the cleaning women in 1990 benefitted from local wage raises, were interviewed on local as well as national television, and featured in the magazine "Municipal employee" and, above all, that they did not give up. In the fall of 1990, we continued our work to find new ways to lessen our dependence on the employer's good will. We were, for instance, able to arrange courses at the hospital itself with the help of the local county college. This was not, however, a matter of buying additional time with the help of adult education subsidies. The cleaning women were able to attend the courses during work hours, but this reduced the time left over for cleaning, which of course was somewhat of a problem.

The education provided by the county college went on for a full academic year. During this time, the cleaning crew studied chemistry, problems of the work environment and budgeting. They also launched new discussions of the organization of their work. The conditions are in a constant state of flux, since the hospital is in a phase of reorganization and wards are being closed and opened now and again.

The education has yielded some concrete results. While studying chemistry, for instance, the women learned that the spirit they had been using for many years to clean the wash-stands dries out the skin very much. There are no warnings to that effect in the instructions that accompany the product.

In the courses on budgeting and computer processing, the cleaning crew learned about the budget system that the hospital was in the process of adopting. When the system was introduced to the hospital staff, the cleaning women were proud to be the only ones who understood it. This was a source of irritation to other groups on the payroll and a triumph for the cleaning women.

In a review of cleaning methods, the women also learned that scrubbing the floors, which was one of the main causes of work-related injuries, wears out the floors too much and should be avoided! Today, they simply mop the floors with water, which is easier both on the floors and on their own backs and shoulders. Their work was also made easier through the acquisition of an electrical mopping moped, which can be used for the larger areas.

One of the women, who in spite of working only four hours a day has been on sick leave for long periods of time because of pain in her shoulders, etc., told me with a relieved smile when I met her in the spring of 1991:

Can you imagine, Gunilla, it doesn't hurt anymore. I went to the physical therapist this summer and she

showed me some exercises that I did for a while. But since we got the mopping machine and don't have to scrub the floors anymore it stopped. I haven't had to do the exercises. *It doesn't hurt.*

Another step towards mobilizing public opinion, raising morale, etc., was the workers' conference arranged by the Eskilstuna SKAF division in September of 1990. Approximately 40 cleaning staff from central Sweden attended. In addition to information about cleaning materials, ergonomics and "good examples", the conference focused on how to find ways to strengthen these workers' position. The slogan that summed up the feelings expressed at the conference was that we need a little

get up and go!

Three years after the circle stopped meeting, things look different at this cleaning center. The women have their own budget (within certain limits set by the hospital administration), they plan the cleaning of the different areas themselves, they have a mopping machine (a kind of cleaning machine that you ride) and time for studying and doing exercises. Work-related injuries have been reduced considerably, but the women still see themselves as a very vulnerable group when it comes to changes in the hospital's organization, reforms that come from above, etc. They still feel that they are on the bottom rung of the ladder and the victims of arbitrary decisions made by the "big bosses".

At present, I am carrying out in-depth interviews with the women in a life-story perspective concerning their life-long learning. In addition to their personal history, we talk about what happened in the research circle. One of the women said this, when asked if there had been any changes:

Yes, in self-esteem, since we tended to look down on ourselves because we had such a low-status job. As soon as people appeared where we were cleaning, we would back up against the wall, almost as if we were trying to make ourselves invisible. That affects how you are as a person a lot. Now we have, well, it's because I'm a supervisor so I'm forced to have some confidence, since I need to talk to people. And plus this circle. Now I feel I can talk to anybody. And I don't go into hiding as soon as someone comes along or something. No, I myself am a completely different person.

With the restructuring of society that is now taking place in Sweden and which is nothing short of a complete dismantling of the public sector, the

jobs of these women are at risk, however. That is why we spent a lot of time during the interviews talking about what they would do if they lost their jobs. It would require too much space here to give an account of their ideas, but suffice it to say that it would be a shame for society to lose this group. The collective mass of knowledge and the innovativeness they possess are hidden and unexplored resources that society ought to take better care of.

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The Theoretical Background of the Research Circle

A scientific, educational perspective provides mainly a *description* and *explanation* of the processes at work in an educational practise, as well as a *discussion* of how these can be altered. It can never, however, function as a list of practical instructions of how to proceed.

In order to explain what happens/can happen in a research circle and discuss the possibilities inherent in this method, I wish to introduce a few theoretical principles, mainly those formulated by Paulo Freire and Oskar Negt. I also wish to present certain glimpses from a debate dating back to the beginning of the 20th century, involving such educators as Francisco Ferrer, Adolphe Ferrière and Célestin Freinet.

The theoreticians I have included share a *firm belief in the equal worth of all human beings*. They hold that people can learn infinitely more, that everybody has a large, untapped potential to work with and that, in societies such as ours, there is enormous waste of human as well as other resources.

They also subscribe to the notion that *education can never be neutral*, but is always used with a certain intention. To pretend otherwise would be to put oneself in the service of the establishment, the oppressors, the well-to-do.

Furthermore, all of them believe that *theories about educational processes must never be separated from their societal context* and need to be reassessed when conditions change.

These shared convictions mean that the theories presented below are in general applicable to the situations under discussion. As to individual research circles, the ideas may be applicable only in part, and to varying degrees.

I will go to some length to explain concepts that are not very wide-spread (at least not right now) in Sweden, but which go a long way toward explaining developments I have noted, especially in the research circles where I myself have participated. The first chapter is about three educators from the beginning of this century, who worked with children and adolescents. Freire and Negt, on whom I will then focus the attention, are still active educators whose main interest has been in adult education².

² Paulo Freire, however, was for a couple of years the Education Commissioner of São Paulo in Brazil and was therefore ultimately responsible for millions of children. He is now retired, but he still writes.

Three Educators from the Early 1900's

Ferrière, Ferrer and Freinet

Adolphe Ferrière was one of the many reform educators who were active during the first few decades of the 20th century. He was the director of L'Ecole Nouveau in France. I have decided to include Ferrière even though he was not specifically concerned with adult education theory, because his book about the work school "L'Ecole Active" (Schule der Selbstbetätigung) is an excellent illustration of a collective developmental process. When Ferrière describes his activities school, or work school (which is the word I will use here), he does not claim to have "invented" a new way of working. Instead, he lists several of his sources inspiration and includes the names both of theoreticians and past and contemporary practitioners. He does not take credit for having explored or developed the ideas of any one predecessor. The work school, according to Ferrière, aspires to "an ideal of spontaneous, personal and productive activity". It opposes the "medieval ideal", which held that experience was worthless compared to pure ideas. According to Ferrière, man must live too, not just think:

Ist das Leben Ohne Denken schon recht wenig, so ist
das Denken ohne Leben rein gar Nichts. (Ferrière
1928, p 3)³

Ferrière sees his ideal not as anti-intellectual, but anti-intellectualistic, and he does not want to take credit for it himself, but refers to Montaigne, Locke, J.J. Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Fichte and Froebel. Yes, he says, it has been the ideal of all intuitive and gifted educators who have come before us. He affirms that the only difference between the old educators and his own time is that what thinkers felt intuitively can now be "scientifically proven through psychology".

In answer to the more direct question of what the work school really is, Ferrière says that it is not a question of *being*, but of *becoming*. What it was yesterday, it will no longer be tomorrow. The principles at work are of a dynamic, not static, nature. It is not exactly organized chaos, but neither is it a rigid mechanism.

Among the educators and schools that tried to implement these ideas at the beginning of the 20th century, Ferrière mentions the Ferrer school in Lausanne, Decroly in Belgium, Montessori in Italy, the Ruskin Home School in England, Samskolan in Göteborg (founded by Sven Lönborg and brought to Ferrière's attention by the early Swedish feminist Ellen Key),

³ Just as life without thought is limited, so thought without life is nothing.

Slöjdskolan in Naäs (which, however, he found to be pedantic and lacking in inspiration and imagination, as well as unsuitable for children), Jan Lighart in Belgium and Dewey in the United States.

In his introduction to the third printing of the German edition of his book, Ferrière claims that the expression "école active" was unknown as late as 1918. (In 1914, he published the first of what he called his "little studies", in which he introduced the notion of work school, which he and many others later claimed had been an unfortunate choice of words.) Only two years later, in 1920, "école active" was the motto of the day. Ferrière was always eager to keep in touch with the new movements of his time. He attended the international conferences of 1922, 1923 and 1925, all of which focused on the renewal of educational practises. In this context, he once again presented a series of schools in different countries, where the new ideas were being applied.

I wish this introduction to show that, most of the time, ideas are not produced by a single individual and then reworked in different ways by his successors, which is often claimed to be the case. Instead, ideas may exist in a state of gestation and come to fruition only when the "climate" is right. Another important point is that for at least the last 100 years and really, intuitively as Ferrière puts it, much longer, there have been enough educational knowledge and even occasional attempts to implement different types of progressive educational theory. What has been missing, however, to make this a more wide-spread educational practise, is the political and class-defined base needed for its realization.

The two other educational thinkers mentioned, Ferrer and Freinet, both have a more pronounced political aim for their activities. Francisco Ferrer, the founder of Barcelona's modern school in 1901, can even be said to have been executed for his commitment to these ideas. Ferrer was held in great esteem by Sweden's budding labor movement. Hjalmar Branting and Ellen Key praised his work in the magazine *Tiden* (Time), in 1909 and 1910 respectively. They drew a parallel between the unsympathetic coverage of Ferrer in the conservative Swedish press shown to the negative attitude toward the Workers' Institute, when it opened in Stockholm. The silent treatment accorded to Ferrer and his "modern school" has, however, persisted and he can hardly be considered a well-known educator in Sweden. But then again, Swedish teachers have not on the whole been noted for a clear and unequivocal socialist commitment.

This is demonstrated by the fact that the last of our three educators, Célestin Freinet, is a more familiar name in Sweden. Freinet himself mentions both Ferrière and Ferrer among his models, but the "depoliticized" version of Freinet that has been popularized in Sweden is best known for the concept of "the pedagogy of work", which is associated primarily with printing

activities (nowadays also computers) in the classroom (cf. Harnsten 1988). Dietrich, however, lifts out the strong political dimension of Freinet's pedagogy in her work from 1982 on French Freinet teachers. One of the tenets of the French followers of Freinet that Dietrich wants to develop further is that *the struggle to achieve a better educational practise is a political struggle that cannot be separated from political movements and forces.*

Paulo Freire

Just as the above section on Adolphe Ferrière clearly demonstrates that practical ideas do not just materialize out of the blue, it is equally true to say that everyone involved in progressive education in recent years has been influenced and inspired by the work of Paulo Freire. It is not clear to what extent Freire's thought has influenced education in Sweden, however. For instance, Staffan Selander claims in his dissertation that "Freire's practical pedagogy is too narrow to be applied within the framework of the Swedish educational system" (Selander 1984, p 161). Selander limited his analysis to a very restricted portion of Freire's ideas and failed to include important areas where he is still considered influential. Both Kall—s and Rodhe (1984) and Jan-Erik Perneman (1985) have pointed this out. These researchers refuted Selander's claims with a detailed description of the influence Freire has exerted in the field of adult education, both in Sweden and internationally. Perneman, whose thesis is also on the work of Freire (Perneman 1977), taught for some years at the Nordic Folk Academy in Kungälv, near Göteborg, and he still sets great store by these ideas. As recently as in 1990, Freire participated in a conference held in Kungälv. This goes to show that Freire's theories, which have been in use (and sometimes misuse) for the past 20 years, are still alive and healthy in some circles in Sweden, mainly in adult education.

To try to comment on or quote only certain parts of Freire's interpretation of "the great human task on behalf of the oppressed" (Freire 1974, p 39), feels somewhat sacrilegious. It is impossible to do justice to Freire's vast erudition and social pathos in just a few pages, without greatly circumscribing their significance. Reading Freire is an enriching experience for anybody with a sincere interest in educational questions. What I can do in this context is to select those aspects that I have found to be the most important in regard to the research circle. Viewed in this perspective, the sources of Freire's inspiration are of course also of importance. In his preface to the first work by Freire to be translated into Swedish, *Pedagogy of the oppressed* (Freire 1972), Sten Rodhe lists them: "Sartre and Mounier, Erich Fromm and Louis Althusser, Ortega y Gasset and Mao, Martin Luther King and Ché Guevara, Unamuno and Marcuse, Hegel, Marx, Lenin, Lukács, etc." (p 9). These are all existential and/or Marxist thinkers.

Since there have been so many analyses and interpretations of Freire, in Sweden too but mainly in other countries where his work has been published, there are many different angles from which to approach his ideas. In the preface to the German edition of *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, Ernst Lange (to whom Sten Rodhe refers in the Swedish edition) condenses Freire's thought to three main concepts, which I will discuss one by one below. They are:

1. The culture of silence
2. Education is never neutral
3. An educational criticism of the revolution

THE CULTURE OF SILENCE. By the culture of silence, Freire means the silence that has developed as a result of the oppression whose most important instrument is today's mandatory schools:

The most important instrument of this 'cultural invasion,' this occupation of the minds of the oppressed by the myths of the oppressors, is education, both the institutionalized school system and the informal learning processes, which are perpetually staged in an atmosphere of violence and anguish. (Freire 1972, p 13)

Here, as usual, Freire is concerned mainly with the situation in the Third World. It should come as no surprise that the public schools and other "controlled educational units" in our societies have the same function, but in a more subtle and surreptitious way (see e.g. Abrahamsson 1974, Lundberg, Selander and Ohlund 1976, Berner, Callewaert and Silverbrandt 1977, Holmstrand 1989). Good ideas and visions are brought down by the inherent contradictions of everyday reality. "Liberating", "participant-directed", "consciousness-raising", etc. are ideals that fade away to nothing in the confrontation with concrete reality, irrespective of the good intentions of those involved (cf. Hårnsten 1988).

Freire shows that a majority of the citizens in the industrialized countries must also be considered to be enclosed in "the culture of silence", by describing what the culture of silence and adjustment means in "modern society":

Perhaps the greatest tragedy of modern man is his domination by the force of these myths and his manipulation by organized advertising, ideological or otherwise. Gradually, without even realizing the loss, he relinquishes his capacity for choice; he is expelled from the orbit of decisions. (Freire, 1973, p 6)



To combat the culture of silence, a *work of demystification* is needed, to use Freire's term. This means, first of all, denouncing the structures that prevent people from having a say in the decisions that touch their own lives. This is certainly no easy task and must be combined with a *scientific criticism of reality*, a criticism not "produced" by experts, but *developed in cooperation between scientists and practitioners*. One consequence of this view of knowledge is that scientific knowledge cannot simply be transmitted. If it is, it too turns into an ideological myth, even when it is transmitted with the intention to liberate people.

One major problem highlighted by Freire is that many "scientists" have a very limited, and therefore flawed, picture of reality, which is a result of structural factors. In order for today's highly technological societies to work, we need a series of specialists who work in clearly defined fields. These fields develop into "specialisms" and the situation degenerates into one of *myth-generating irrationalism*, which obstructs the development of a well-balanced scientific perspective. Obviously, specialists are not an evil in and of themselves, but the environment in which they are formed limits their ability to see clearly:

Distinct from specialties, to which we are not opposed, specialisms narrow the area of knowledge in such a way that the so-called "specialists" become generally incapable of thinking. Because they have lost the vision of the whole of which their "specialty" is only one dimension, they cannot even think correctly in the area of their specialization. (Freire, 1970, pp 79-80)

This means that cooperation and confrontation with people in everyday reality would lead to a questioning of the "scientific" perspective and/or approach. At best, this can bring with it a reappraisal and a fresh quest for knowledge. This is not to say that experience from "everyday life" in and of itself lends a different perspective and increases understanding. Nevertheless, cooperation can develop a critical way of looking at reality. Freire emphasizes that this method of clarifying reality means training people to engage in a constant process of reassessment, of analyzing findings, using scientific methods and processes and learning to see themselves in a dialectical relationship with their social reality. By developing such an approach, education would be able to help people develop an increasingly critical attitude to the world and in this way to change it.

EDUCATION IS NEVER NEUTRAL. This critical outlook naturally fosters and fuels the opposition between the powers that be and the people that are

being exploited. This leads us to the second point in the summary above, i.e. that *education is never neutral*. Lange expresses this truth by saying that education is an instrument either for man's liberation or for his domestication. It is not, however, the pedagogy in itself that incites people to rebel. A liberating pedagogy has nothing to do with propaganda or political slogans, it is not a question of programming, but rather of *problemizing*:

The subject matter is the daily lives of the students and their experience of this life, their minds, with all of their contradictions, their own words, values, conceptions and prejudices. (Lange in Freire 1974, p 15)

The more accurately men grasp true causality, the more critical their understanding of reality will be. (Freire, 1973, p 44)

If education helps increase awareness, this is a consequence of an increased understanding of reality. It is therefore the task of the political leaders (or in our case mainly the unions) to see to it that this awareness is used in a suitable way. A pedagogy of freedom can be of use in popular politics, since it is through increased awareness that people are able to comprehend how social structures are used as instruments of power and violence. It is not, however, the task of the educator (or in our case the researcher) to orient this newly formed awareness in any particular political direction.

Accordingly, the limits of how far this type of pedagogy can reach are determined by the strength of the political (and/or union) organizations, which represent "the newly awakened".

AN EDUCATIONAL CRITICISM OF THE REVOLUTION. In this third area, Freire develops an educational criticism of the revolution. This is clearly of no relevance to today's Swedish society, where it is all too clear that no revolution has taken place. However, the view of man that Freire advocates here too could in many respects be useful in a pedagogy designed for our societies. He writes:

Our pedagogy cannot do without a vision of man and of the world. It formulates a scientific humanist conception which finds its expression in a dialogical praxis in which the teachers and learners together, in the act of analyzing a dehumanizing reality, denounce it while announcing its transformation in the name of the liberation of man. For this very reason, denunciation and annunciation in this

utopian pedagogy are not meant to be empty words,
but an historic commitment. (Freire 1970, p 40)

This passage contains many ideas that we can use to guide us in our work with research circles. A word of warning is, however, issued in Rodhe's preface to *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. We should not, he insists, strive for "reformative palliatives, which serve only to prolong the oppression" (1972, p 11). Instead, it is a matter of working critically and combining critical analysis with action to find your own way in the exact historical situation in which you find yourself at a given moment.

THE DIALOGUE. If we view the research circle as an educational forum, where, under the most favorable conditions, some kind of genuine dialogue will evolve, where new knowledge is exchanged and developed, where the monopoly on knowledge held by researchers and, to an even greater extent, by employers, can be challenged, Freire offers much enlightening material.

A union strategy to promote change through education can serve as a counterforce to the controlling function exercised by e.g. personnel training programs. Freire, quoting Simone de Beauvoir, states that:

Indeed, the interests of the oppressors lie in
'changing the consciousness of the oppressed, not
the situation which oppresses them.' (Freire 1968, p
60)

Freire also shows researchers how to find another view of knowledge than that which prevails in the academic world. For this to happen, they need input from sources other than the closed-off world of research. Authentic thought, thought that cares about *reality*, is not born in the isolation of the ivory tower. It can be achieved only through communication, according to Freire.

One important dimension in all of Freire's books is the *dialogue*, which he defines as an encounter between individuals, mediated by the world, in order to name the world. A dialogue, then, cannot occur between those who wish to name the world and those who do not wish this naming – between those who deny others the right to speak and those who are denied that right. A dialogue, in Freire's sense of the word, cannot occur if the parties (or one of them) lack *humility*. As far as the researchers and their view of themselves and their knowledge go, this means:

How can I dialogue if I consider myself a member of
the in-group of 'pure' men, the owners of truth and
knowledge, for whom all non-members are 'those
people' or 'the great unwashed.' (ibid, p 92)

Dialogue requires a strong faith in people, a faith which at the same time needs to be realistic in view of the existing conditions, but which must not for that matter forget the visionary aspect:

Faith in man is an *a priori* requirement for dialogue... 'dialogical man' is critical and knows that although it is within the power of men to create and transform, in a concrete situation of alienation men may be impaired in the use of that power. Far from destroying his faith in man, however, this possibility strikes him as a challenge to which he must respond. He is convinced that the power to create and transform, even when thwarted in concrete situations, tends to be reborn. And that rebirth can occur – not gratuitously, but in and through the struggle for liberation – in the superseding of slave labor by emancipated labor, which gives zest to life. Without this faith in man, dialogue is a farce, which inevitably degenerates into paternalistic manipulation. (ibid, p 79)

In addition to this faith, Freire mentions *hope and critical thinking* as other prerequisites for a genuine dialogue. Without hope, you are resigned to a hopelessness characterized by a denial of and escape from the world. Critical thinking is related to *action*. For a critically thinking person, the continuing transformation of reality is the most important thing in the humanization of man.

Time and time again, in many different contexts and versions, Freire returns to the difference between adjusting man to a given reality and working together to achieve a more humane world. In a research circle, this means long-term work over many different stages, which may seem irrational to the casual observer. "Specialists", in Freire's sense of the term, maintain that it ought to be possible to transmit and directly apply scientific knowledge in the same way that well-planned and tested action programs are. This, however, means yielding to a simplified picture of reality. In order for new knowledge to be understood and integrated, you need *knowledge both of objective situations and of people's understanding of these situations*. By working together on the empirical knowledge about reality, which can gradually be placed in larger, possibly more theoretical contexts, a knowledge will eventually evolve of the *causes* of this reality. This can often be frustrating and trigger unexpected reactions:

For as the people emerge into a state of awareness, they discover that the elite regard them with

contempt; in reaction, they tend whenever possible to respond aggressively. The elite, in turn, frightened at the threat to the legitimacy of their power, attempt by force or by paternalism to silence and domesticate the masses; they try to impede the process of popular emergence. The middle class, fearing proletarianization and always seeking privileges and upward mobility, view this popular emergence as, at the very least, a threat to their own "peace" and react with predictable mistrust. (Freire, 1973, pp 32-33)

Finally, I wish to emphasize once again *the limitations imposed on us by the political reality in which we find ourselves today*. I will expound on this later on, when describing the projects carried out in former West Germany by Oskar Negt. In his preface to Freire's *Education for Critical Consciousness* in 1975, Francisco Weffort states:

If these people nevertheless continue to be manipulated, it is because they quite objectively did not find any other political possibility. In other words, the educator must combine his or her work with genuine, large-scale political work and this task has never been seriously attempted. (Weffort in Freire, 1975, p 40)

As I mentioned above, Freire's theories are at their most useful in the Third World, i.e. in situations that are in many respects different from ours. One factor that should be kept in mind in this context is that the basic social conditions are visible there in a way that is completely different from, for example, present-day Sweden. The differences in living conditions, power structure and means of production, etc., are much more visible, which may make it easier to carry out education with a clearly emancipatory aim.

In "highly developed and industrialized capitalist countries" it is possible to hide these conditions to a much greater extent, which means that you must assume a different attitude in an educational situation. A person who has spent a lot of time analyzing these problems, especially in the form of study circles for factory workers, is Oskar Negt.

Oskar Negt

In a number of books (e.g. Negt 1975, 1978, 1987), Negt has developed his notions of the *sociological imagination* and *exemplary learning*. As with previous "pioneers" that I have mentioned, Negt too merits a more detailed presentation and analysis than what I can provide here. Such a task would require a considerable amount of time and space, but I nevertheless consider it most urgent. To my knowledge, no such serious attempt has ever been made in Sweden. The only one of Negt's works to have been translated into Swedish is his latest, *Living Work, Stolen Time. Political and Cultural Dimensions in the Fight for Working Hours* (Negt 1987). This may, however, be an indication of a heightened interest in his work at the moment. In Denmark his work has always attracted a lot more attention and many different kinds of educators have expounded on his theories⁴ (see below). For example, it was a group of students at Roskilde University Center (RUC) that translated *Soziologische Phantasie und exemplarisches Lernen* (German original, 1971) into Danish in 1975, in the hope of encouraging use of this book outside all but the smallest university circles. For our purposes, I will limit myself to what I consider to be Negt's most important contributions to the discussion on "the pedagogy of the research circle".

Most of what follows has been culled from the introduction to the Danish edition by Carsten Cuhn and Kai Rasmussen (i.e., pp 7-25 in Negt 1975). I have translated their ideas rather freely and will only exceptionally provide more literal quotations.

The Danes start off by saying that Negt's work is an attempt to *redefine the content of the educational work being done within the organizational framework of trade unions and labor parties*.

The overall objective is to give the working class the possibility, through certain learning processes, to *discover and gather collective experiences and give them a political meaning*.

It is a matter, then, of people training their *sociological imagination*, based on their experience of everyday life and information about the society we live in. In short, to develop a way of thinking that allows the individual to understand the relationship between her or his own life and societal conditions.

⁴ One example of such successors is the women mentioned earlier, who are now working on people's life stories (Harrits and Scharnberg). Another example is the work carried out by teams of socialist teachers in the late 1970's (Drabj 1983).

This is the kind of education that Negt labels *exemplary learning*. It aims to free the working class from the economic, political, social and ideological limitations imposed on it by a capitalist mode of production. It is applicable both to the individual worker, the entire working class and, in a more general sense, to the way in which we live together.

It is important, therefore, to design the goal of the learning processes, their content and form so that they coincide with the present reality and current trends.

This means determining the exact extent to which the conditions of production hamper not only the forces of production, but also the level of awareness of the working class. This requires knowledge about (and making allowances for) the true level of development of the class struggle and the possibilities of affecting both the objective and the subjective dimensions of the individual conflict.

The starting point, then, is the everyday lives of the workers. The goal of the learning process is to put this day-to-day experience in perspective. This is all part of a process whose ultimate objective is to determine the extent to which the situation at the workplace, in the family, etc. is shaped by societal factors, with capitalism as the limiting structure for the whole situation of the working class.

An important part of the process is action:

Only to the extent that the exemplary learning processes lead to direct action will they be able to amount to anything over and above mere "clarification" or "consciousness-raising". (ibid, p 11)

The authors also insist on the importance of developing a sense of security and solidarity in smaller units during the first – and preferably very long – phase. "Discussion groups" without any set programs or study plans are necessarily the right way to start out.

During the second phase, it is crucial to include the personal/private sphere in the processing of the collective experience. This is because capitalism cannot be overcome through a "step-by-step emancipation". Instead, it is essential to show that even people's free time is regulated by the "first commandment" of a capitalist mode of production, i.e. accumulate, accumulate!

One must therefore be prepared to explain how the wholly legitimate needs for recreation and relaxation are used to consolidate a system whose abolition is in the objective interest of the working class. If this is not done, an effective private sphere may inhibit the ability or willingness to change the

production sphere. In other words, a person's working life experience is repressed through, for instance, amusing, relaxing entertainment, alcohol or other compensatory measures. It can also be denied through media manipulation (e.g. television) or in the confrontation with completely different experiences in the home, or through recreational or hobby activities.

In this light, all new TV channels must be considered to be a devastating part of everyday life, not least because of their monopoly on the news.

In order to process societal conflicts in a productive way, Negt relies on the *exemplary principle*. This is a theory that originated in bourgeois pedagogy, according to the Danes, who refer back to Negt. The bourgeois version of the exemplary principle means that you can reduce the subject matter in a course and instead "investigate complex relationships from the perspective of a central point of view", according to Negt. In regular education, especially on the junior high level, the exemplary principle has been applied to solve what is known as "subject matter crowding". It is, however, clearly a method of limited use, since, in Negt's view, it can be used neither to describe the educational goals on the basis of historical and societal needs, nor to abolish the conventional division of labor between different scientific domains. Consequently, the bourgeois version of the exemplary principle is more than anything a purely educational method that is characterized by inherent contradictions and deficiencies.

From Negt's point of view, it also represents a transmission of information, which, since it is divorced from any sociological or political education processes, reinforces society's existing power structure. In the same way, the bourgeois exemplary principle can be (mis-)used to cement the bureaucratic organization of the unions. A pedagogy that is used to convey "work models" or "type situations" to union ombudsmen for use in different situations perpetuates the inflexible roles in the unions too, Negt concludes.

With this limited use, people run the risk of adapting to a system whose survival is not at all in the interest of the workers. In addition, their own experience does not coincide with the information they are supposed to absorb.

According to Negt, an exemplary principle that will be effectively received must be based on:

- *the experience of the workers themselves
- * their present situation
- * the level of awareness
- * the level of psychological well-being
- * the social conditions
- * other living conditions of an economic and political nature

Since all of the above interact in a situation of conflict, which also is characterized by – although not visibly – fundamental societal contradictions, they are in themselves examples of the contradictions inherent in society. For the workers themselves these factors emerge as an exemplary example and provide a new perspective. Among other things, this means that they can discover that individual experiences and problems are in fact universal. Since the contradictions can be traced back to conflicts in society, on the one hand, and stand in direct relation to the individual worker's own experience, on the other, an effective learning situation is created.

Negt evaluates the *content* and *form* of education on the basis of three different factors:

1. Their *proximity to the interests of the individual*.
2. Those elements in the workers' consciousness which extend beyond immediate interests and concern *more universal problems in society*.
3. The *importance* that the content of the learning process can have for the *liberation of the workers*. In other words, to what extent does this process manage to fulfill the individuals' needs for satisfaction and at the same time hold on to the liberation impulse in the workers' awareness?

This means, then, that it is necessary to link together the individuals' background with the objective, collective living situation, so as to leave a lasting impression of the entire picture. This can be achieved only in an action and discussion forum, where the ongoing class struggle is analyzed. Negt does, however, also emphasize that the limitations on what can be achieved through the teaching processes are *determined almost exclusively by society*. His analysis of the present situation cannot be accused of being unduly optimistic:

Today's political concepts and entire political game between parties, about representation, etc.; do not

correspond either to the workers' awareness or the objective situation in society. (ibid, p 23)

The Danish authors tend to support Negt's view that the educational work should be based in the unions, but they also stress the importance for the labor unions to assume an autonomous position in relation to the traditional workers' parties and not to forget the political function of the economic struggle.

It is equally important to question the mechanistic view of the relationship between consciousness and societal being. *Political awareness is not a mechanic product of objective relationships, but presupposes instead a long-term educational work.* The Danes also point out that it is not up to the intellectuals/educators, i.e. the academics, to put together one eloquently formulated program after another or one learning process after another. It ought to be up to the workers themselves to set up educational programs at their workplaces or any other place. The know-how of the intellectuals can in this instance serve as *an aid to the workers in the planning/design of their own learning process.* The intellectuals will then constitute a resource from which the workers can gather material and increase their knowledge.

The Danish authors conclude:

Didactic work is not carried out at a desk, but collectively in organizations. Negt sees *union work* as the most important. For him, one of the central themes is the development of the *sociological imagination*, i.e. breaking the hegemony of bourgeois ideology in the workers' consciousness, by lifting out those elements that represent real, concrete experiences resulting from a person's objective position in the production process. The sociological imagination would then evolve into a political understanding of society as a whole, *in such a way as not to exclude the imagination from the field of action* (which is often the case with phrase-mongering sectarian groups), but instead *to convert the imagination into the people's most important productive force in society* (and not in a sublimated or privatized way as in advanced bourgeois culture or as a form of businesslike or technological innovativeness). (ibid, p 27)

In the first chapter of *Sociological Imagination and Exemplary Learning*, Negt describes the situation in West Germany at the time when he started his work in the labor unions. He accuses the traditional adult education centers

and the union education programs of being stuck at the "pre-scientific axiomatic level of pedagogy". He claims that this description fits all other types of learning institutes as well.

Negt purposely avoided including white-collar workers and office workers in the analysis of his later experiments. If they had been included, he holds, the danger of unfounded generalizations would have been too great.

As a result, he claims not to know what happens in the work with these groups. However, Negt believes that the double function of these employees, both as salaried workers and as holders of certain predefined positions in a hierarchical system, tends to lead to conflicts which can either stimulate or block the education process.⁵ A similar problem plagues "inter-union life", where full-time officials tend to develop a different world view than most of the members they represent. Negt holds that:

The establishment of a middle-class ideology within the labor unions facilitates the process which "slowly but surely" is threatening to turn a formally democratic society into an authoritarian, class-segregated or even fascist society. (ibid, p 40)

Negt warns against a blind faith in Methods (with a capital M), i.e. placing greater value on form than on content. In his view, today's widespread "fetishization" of methodology is part of the technocratic ideologies that limit enlightenment interests to the narrow sphere of technological rationale. In this way, the problem of the content of education is made invisible.

For the labor movement, this has meant learning about the practical aspects of organizing. Negt maintains that *methods that are defined as to content* and especially designed for worker education must be used instead. The content-defined method advocated by Negt is called, with his pedagogical term, *exemplary learning*. This educational form must stem from the fact that today's worker lives in a state of permanent tension due to the feeling of inevitability as to his social living conditions and his desire to cease being a worker.

In order to meet the legitimate need for education, today's employers have become aware of a number of problems and are busy launching grand education schemes to increase the participants' "understanding of the situation". Negt has no respect or sympathy for this type of program,

⁵ Draby (1987) and others have shown that such experiments can hinder a "consciousness-raising practise".

however. According to him, they are based on interests that are completely divorced from the objective interests of the working class:

The ideology based on the harmonizing interests of different classes in society, which is at the bottom of these programs, can often be hidden quite successfully, by proclaiming that the educational work will focus on structural conflicts. These conflicts are said to be about vague concepts, such as 'freedom, responsibility and security', or at best, about the 'difficulties forced on people by the double loyalty to work and union', in such a way as completely to ignore the conflicts in society. (ibid, p 49)

A workers' education that centers on conflict and is designed from a political perspective must instead focus on three main areas:

1. The clearly defined interests, ideals and views of society that can be generalized and integrated into typologies by using current empirical scientific methods.
2. The mental and cognitive mechanisms of alienation (e.g. the tendency to personify, a simplified use of language, etc.), which can be traced back to society as a whole or just one class.
3. The objective economic and social living conditions of the workers.

The ideologies based on cooperation and equality which are espoused officially may have left "an impression of a progressive world order" on a limited number of the organized workers, according to Negt. But due to a number of factors, the cooperation ideologies have not been able to dissolve and replace the negative social self-esteem of the large majority of workers. This self-esteem includes notions of surplus value, unemployment, the dubious results of technological progress under the given circumstances, of the power of capital, etc.

It is true that these notions have frequently lost their specifically economic meaning, but they nevertheless signal the workers' deep-felt "discomfort" in a society that is based on a structure of privileges defined by class. This discomfort gives rise to a social topic (a common world view), which stays in the awareness of the working class, even in periods where there is no direct threat. This topic may include e.g. *a general feeling of insecurity, the possibility of a new workplace and a lack of faith in the stability of society, closely allied with unemployment as an economic reality.* This is all perceived as being the result

of technological development and the structural crises of a capitalist economy.

The remarkable stability of this topic is proof, says Negt, of the workers' high degree of *sociological sensitivity* to societal changes that may effect their immediate interests and their actual position in society.

It is important to bear in mind the content of this social topic when designing education programs, so as not to dismiss it as preconceived notions, ideological remnants or wishful thinking. Instead, the topic should be allowed to form part of the participants' consciousness-raising process. If not, there is an overhanging danger that the workers will adjust to and unresistingly identify with a society which can only satisfy their private needs at the cost of repressing their needs for solidarity and belonging.

In my view, one of the most important tasks of the research circle is contained in this very notion, i.e. not to bulldoze over existing ideas, ideas that are actually based on a concrete and historical reality. *In this way, the research circle may constitute an alternative to resignation.*

NEGT'S FOLLOWERS IN SWEDEN. In Sweden, it is mainly Lena Hellbom (1985) and Jan Holmer (1987) who have written in depth about the influence Negt has had on their own work. Lena Hellbom refers to Negt in her dissertation (and to Kluge, Negt and Kluge 1972), when discussing the notion of *proletarian public life* in relation to *party interests* and *bourgeois public life*. In the circles that Hellbom studied and examined, an authentic proletarian public life (based on the experiences of the workers themselves) has not been able or not been allowed to emerge, apart from extremely sporadic and short-lived examples. In a historical review of the emergence of labor education in Sweden, Hellbom also notes that both exemplary principles and the sociological imagination have been largely absent. She concludes:

The personal quest – a study goal that grows out of the participants' own experiences based on their discussions (=talks), i.e. out of the ideal conditions for a study circle – has remained by and large an ideal, a utopia. The study circles that do work in this manner can be said to constitute the exception rather than the rule. (Hellbom 1985, p 351)

Hellbom's conclusions are quite critical of the way the labor movement has let "free methods" determine form but not content. She notes that the participants are assimilated into a predetermined way of thinking.

In his dissertation, Jan Holmer analyzes the work he has been involved with in circles held in shipyards and university circles for shipyard workers, in the light of Negt's theories (see above). He sees both advantages and risks in using this method. One important reservation that Holmer makes is that the world view of the teachers/researchers (i.e. their more or less unscientific knowledge) is important in this context and needs to be clarified.

In conclusion, Holmer lists a series of requirements that he – as an extension of Negt – believes must be clarified and defined before you start working on e.g. a research circle. He mentions the *participants' world view, the direction of the work (goal, methods, results)* and *the distribution of roles* (Holmer 1987, p 283). This kind of list can be helpful, if not taken too literally, since there is a great risk in such an approach, too.

It is clear that theories and categorizations are needed both as a source of inspiration and as a basis for description and explanation. They must not, however, be allowed to become set, inflexible models. This point is in agreement with Ferrière's words about the work school: "it is not a question of *being*, but of *becoming*". The same is certainly true of research circles.

Obviously, we need to collect our experiences, discuss different ways, theoretize and categorize, but we must never draw up rigid models or manuals with too many details, since this would turn the research circle into a pre-packaged method devoid of both life and creativity.

The day when we "research circle researchers" think that we have found *the* Method, Form or Structure that tells us how to work, that day marks the end of this idea. The whole point of research circles, which some participants may experience as extremely stressful and insecure, is that it represents a highly dynamic way for people to work together, people who are allowed to be different and react in very different ways and sometimes completely unpredictably. It is precisely this aspect that is the most creative and exciting and even carries within it the possibility of generating new knowledge. From the outset, *none* of the participants know what will happen. If they did, it would not be a research circle.

When reading texts by Negt or his followers, it is easy to forget that it really is *fun* to be part of a research circle. One should not let oneself become so wrapped up in the process of generalizing, analyzing and theoretizing about the activities that one forgets, in one's eagerness to "scientize" everything, that what motivates the researchers to participate in this kind of work, in spite of the uncertainty, poor remuneration, etc., is the atmosphere, the spirit, that often permeates this meeting. All sorts of participants have, in a variety of contexts, described this experience breathlessly, with shining eyes.

This fact is obviously also an important aspect of an activity that fights for authentically human values in a world full of inhumanity.

NEGT ON THE ROLE OF THE LABOR UNIONS. It can be seen then that it is extremely important for the content of the circles to coincide with the experience of the participants. The idea of the research circle can definitely not be reduced to a model that uses pre-packaged material and risks adjusting the participants to the existing conditions and attitudes in new ways and to an even greater extent. *Working with the sociological imagination and exemplary learning necessitates a forceful questioning of existing patterns and structures in many different areas and on many different levels.*

The knowledge and awareness that can be created in a research circle are, however, naturally limited as regards their immediate or direct applied use. The whole societal situation in which we find ourselves at the beginning of the 1990's can hardly be said to be conducive to a process of transformation based on principles of solidarity or democracy. What perhaps we can hope for is to provide more and more people with an antidote to resignation and despair and thereby to awaken their willingness and eagerness to fight together for a better world. At the same time, it is important that the exemplary learning processes evolve into direct action in order to set the stage for something more durable than just superficial reactions or temporary consciousness-raising, according to Negt.

In his latest book (1987), Negt ascribes an important role to the trade unions. He maintains that current popular movements, e.g. for peace and the environment, are important, maybe even essential, but he also notes:

The experience to date does indicate that these social movements constitute a threat to the prevailing power structure only at the point when they include major parts of the organized working class. (Negt 1987, p 12)

In this case, the role of the trade unions can hardly be overestimated and Negt also holds that one important step in the right direction is the initiation of an *intraorganizational discussion* of the social self-understanding of the labor unions. In this discussion, he claims to find traces of a new awareness that indicates an awakening from "the collective amnesia". Instead, there is an understanding of the importance of the proletarian struggle for liberation as part of the labor movement. According to Negt, the unions' collective social responsibility lies in determining concretely what practical measures are needed in view of the current trends in society. It is important that people become involved in the issues that form society. Here, Negt once again invokes a well-known statement by Harold Laski:

First, the labor unions need to become democratic in themselves, then they must be able to wield their power effectively in the political arena. (Ibid, p 17)

It may be in this context that the research circle finds its greatest significance – in helping shape a democratic outlook and way of working, where the participants dare to seek out new knowledge, question "scientific" knowledge, and knowledge conveyed by union representatives, to use all available channels to influence and work together to change the existing conditions.

A Preliminary Analysis of some Research Circles

Up until now, researchers have not been able to devote themselves full-time to research circles, which may actually be a good thing. Nevertheless, an in-depth analysis of the workings of the research circle requires a more complete set of data than it has been possible to compile in most circles. The available funds have been sufficient only to start a circle and keep it going. At best, some kind of simple report has been put together of what the circle has accomplished or amounted to. One interesting form of follow-up would be to interview all the participants of a circle and chart the different steps in the processes that the participants go through. Such studies are now under way in several research circles in the Uppsala region. I myself am conducting a study of this type with the participants of the cleaning circle. Since the interviews are reviewed in their entirety by the participants in order to enable them to take part in the analysis of the material, the study has many features in common with participatory research. Furthermore, since the members of the circle are all women, this is an example of a feminist, participatory research study (cf. Maguire 1988, Gottfried 1993). Parts of this material were published in a paper submitted in April 1994 to the Vienna conference of the European Society for Research on the Education of Adults, ESREA (Harnsten 1994).

I want to emphasize the preliminary aspect of the analyses presented below and I hope in the future to be able to expound on them in much more detail, both from a theoretical and an empirical point of view. The circle for cleaning women, however, presented many striking illustrations of the ideas presented by both Freire and Negt.

Freire's main objective was to shatter the *culture of silence*. This requires a *work of demystification*, which can take many forms, depending on the context. In the research circle for cleaning women where I worked, it meant simply that someone was willing to listen and take what was being said seriously. The exacting labor of documenting the work in detail through photographs and written descriptions collected together in a folder made these women visible as a group. The fact that they later stood up for their rights in newspapers and on television is proof both of the pride they take in their work and of the anger they felt because of the way they had been treated.

The demystification work was needed primarily to strengthen the women's faith in their own ability to learn something new. Within the framework of the research circle, the women have now realized that any earlier gaps in their knowledge were due not to any personality defects but to social conditioning. The content of the education they received as a result of the circle was in many respects quite advanced. It is remarkable that the cleaning women were the first at their workplace to learn how the new computerized

budget system worked. Basic knowledge about chemical substances, i.e. knowing which products are safe to use and which are not, also threatens the existing power structure. Freire explains why superiors tend to react negatively to such changes:

From the point of view of the elite, there is no doubt as to what must be done: the masses that are struggling upwards must be domesticated, subjugated within an authoritarian system which is acceptable to the dominating classes. If it is no longer possible to count either on people's traditional meekness or their absence from the political arena, it is all the more crucial to manipulate them into serving the interests of the dominators and to enclose them within narrow limits. (Freire 1975, p 32)

The realization that education (the acquisition of knowledge) *can never be neutral* is a truth that affects all aspects of the work in research circles. The starting point itself, a problem defined by a union, implies a choosing of sides. The knowledge that results from a research circle may sometimes also be used to bring into question a union's stated position, etc. This has happened several times. Another circle held a few years ago on "*The Public Sector and the European Community*" (Holmstrand 1990) concluded by disagreeing with LO's position favoring a Swedish membership.

One advantage of the research circle activities is that the reality and knowledge one comes in contact with are *problemized*. The participants of the cleaning circle were not prepared to accept "good advice" from an ergonomist. They had heard it all before and knew it for what it was worth. Only when ergonomically sound cleaning methods were integrated into a more complete picture based on a faith in the participants' own knowledge, did these improvements make sense to the women. Neither were they willing to "buy" the models for cleaning work that we studied. At one of the places we visited, it was clear to them that the purely cosmetic "changes" had been introduced by the employer and served only to hide the cleaning staff's real problems.

According to Freire, a *dialogue* can never take place if those involved are not willing to question their own values and points of view. In this context, there is every reason to be suspicious of the so-called "dialogue" that is being conducted at workplaces all over Sweden. The controlling function of the employer is hard to regulate in such situations. In the Sala circle, we saw an example of how this function can be expressed, i.e. the administrator who wanted to "send the supervisor on a course" instead of recognizing the whole cleaning staff's educational needs.

Freire stresses the importance of *hope* and *critical thinking* alongside *action* as three prerequisites for a genuine dialogue. Nevertheless, Freire and Negt are both aware that our possibilities of establishing such a dialogue are limited by the political reality we live in. In the cleaning circle, the possibility for action was severely circumscribed by this reality.

Our new strategy consists in adjusting to the prevailing political (and economical) situation in Sweden. The priorities that currently determine the distribution of resources do not allow any implementation of the changes that we know would provide the cleaning women with better working and living conditions. Our society considers it far more important to find "exciting new toys" for our doctors to experiment with, to build new sports complexes, to pour money into spectacular fighter aircraft, gigantic bridges, highways, etc, than to protect those who are worn down in the daily grind by an inhumane work environment. To carry out some minor reforms can never, under these conditions, be more than feeble attempts to safeguard at least a small part of these people's human worth. The participants of the circle are aware that many vast changes are needed before things will start to change for the people "at the bottom of the totem pole". It is this insight that enables them to keep on going in spite of their strenuous situation, to speak up in official contexts and stand up for what they believe in. "*We won't keep quiet now that we've become aware*", they say.

Without a more detailed analysis, it is impossible to determine whether the work in the cleaning circle, for instance, can be said to function according to a kind of *exemplary principle*, in Negt's terms. Nevertheless, we can discuss the possible existence of the conditions that Negt sees as necessary, the first of which would be the *proximity to the individual's interests*. Because the participants of the cleaning circle share a day-to-day reality that the discussion can center on, there is no need to create or recreate special themes or situations. They exist naturally. Most learning situations, including freer forms, like evening courses, university programs and even union courses, with a less rigid structures than conventional educational settings, nevertheless constitute artificial situations (cf. e.g. Jacobsen et al 1980). In research circles held at the workplace, the work material is always readily available and the action aspect is built in. In the two circles I have described, the starting point was the participants' own experiences from their own workplaces. Both the cleaning staff and kitchen help described their own personal situation in minute detail. They then proceeded to discuss the work in the light of their own interests and those of their workmates.

The second point Negt makes concerns the possibility of touching on *more general societal problems*. By including field trips to workplaces with similar (if slightly better) working conditions, the participants' came to realize that their problems are universal and shared by a large part of Sweden's workers,

especially women. This insight prompted the circle participants to accept several invitations to talk about their work. Two women from the kitchen circle have participated in a research course for union representatives at the union's educational facility on the island of Runö. They had also planned to contribute a screen exhibit to the cancelled LO fair in Norrköping in June, 1990. In addition to the media appearances mentioned earlier, the cleaning women have participated in a course for women union activists from both LO and TCO. It was called "Girls - it's time to start dealing with our work environment" and was held in Västerås in October of 1990.

As the discussion grew to include aspects outside of the circle, many issues of a more general union-oriented or political nature were debated in the course of the circles. A growing willingness to participate in union life was also noted.

For obvious reasons, Negt's third point, i.e. the importance of the *liberation of the workers*, is the hardest to assess. The declaration quoted above, "We won't keep quiet now that we've become aware", could be taken as an indication that research circles is one path to take (although it may sometimes seem an awfully indirect one) to initiate the emancipatory work. Research circles do seem to be one way of tapping the *sociological imagination* and the *sociological sensitivity* that Negt mentions and that spring from the workers' social topic. The possibility of linking this to some form of future action would be a way to limit and combat resignation. A clear illustration of the existence of this social topic is the cleaning women's frequently voiced concern that the cleaning operation would be privatized and that they would then lose their jobs. Having access to facts that show that privatization can lead to higher costs (results that emerged from another research circle, see Holmstrand 1988), can then be used as a weapon and a source of strength in the ongoing struggle.

It is highly probable that the labor movement as a whole stands to gain a lot by realigning itself with the social topic of its members, since this would increase the potential for internal democracy in the unions - a prerequisite for exercising the external democratic function.

Conclusion

As can be seen from all the different approaches presented above, I have no intention of providing a clear definition of *The Method*, to be used as a model for all possible situations where a research circle would be a useful work form. Instead, the research circle has emerged and continues to develop in response to certain important needs in present-day society. I want to repeat that the research circle is a work form that has assumed many different shapes depending on where it has been used.

The different possible functions of a research circle in the model presented in this report vary as to their importance and composition:

1. *It can provide adult education, either within the circle itself or by stimulating the participants to get involved in additional education outside the circle.*
2. *It can convey research information.*
3. *It can strengthen the double democratic function of the unions.*
4. *It can contribute new knowledge and new perspectives to research, not least by triggering ideas for future research with a partially new content.*

ADULT EDUCATION. First of all, the research circle activities in themselves can be said to constitute a form of adult education. In addition, the importance of the research circle as an initiation into other forms of education forms cannot be emphasized enough. Since the participants' knowledge and experience are seen as important resources in the circle work, it is possible to work out programs that differ from the employers' suggestions. In this way, the unions can strive for a type of education that combines popular and union education with the need for staff training. This aspect is considered very important by e.g. Alger Klasson (1990), contact researcher for the county of Östergötland. When the participants of a research circle realize that their knowledge and experience count and are important in the transformation process, their interest in education will increase. This is a way to overcome resistance to and fear of learning situations. As shown in the discussion under *Adult Education* above (e.g. Tuomisto and Holmer), it is not enough to present a suitable education program, even if the content is of very high quality. For the learning to be effective in the long term, concrete changes need to be made so that the new knowledge will be seen as meaningful and allowed to evolve in a positive manner. By consulting Freire and Negt (as well as critical psychologists such as Leontiev 1986 and Hayrynen and Hautamäki 1976), we will be able to determine where the limits imposed by the political reality go. At best, we will also be able to make those limits visible and explain why they exist.

RESEARCH INFORMATION. One important function of the research circle is to transmit information to groups that would not ordinarily be able to take part or make use of the results of research. In this context, the attitude of the researcher(s) is very important. Some basic rules are:

- openness and mutuality
- sensitivity to the needs and backgrounds of the participants
- an ability to recognize and respect the knowledge and experience of both parties

Two important advantages of the research circle are that it *provides a possibility to test scientific knowledge* against everyday reality, and that it constitutes an *ideal form for conveying (scientific) knowledge* to interested users. The research circle carries the added advantage of having members that are truly interested in the information that is presented to them.

These remarks bring us to the third aspect, namely the double democratic function.

THE DOUBLE DEMOCRATIC FUNCTION. Both Freire and Negt are concerned with the "double democratic function". In this context, that means that the unions must be democratic in themselves, i.e. intraorganizationally, in order to carry out a democratic mission in society (see section above entitled "Negt on unions").

This cannot be overemphasized. New knowledge adds some backbone to the union's demands and provides the opportunity to exert influence on more equal terms. At the same time, more people can take part in the democratic processes that are needed both in the intraorganizational and the external work.

In order for this to happen, we need to develop knowledge that is relevant and can be systematized. This leads us to the fourth aspect.

NEW KNOWLEDGE FOR RESEARCH. The researchers who choose to get involved in research circles often meet with an unknown or different picture of reality with which to confront their own. In other words, the researchers come in contact with new knowledge and new perspectives which can rock the foundations of their own world, give rise to new questions and perhaps eventually also to new research. This last aspect is necessary to provide new knowledge to meet all those needs that have gradually been awakened through the research circles.

In this summary, I have pointed out some of the important functions of research circles in modern Swedish society. At the same time, I must repeat Ferrière's words, that the pedagogy of the research circle should be a pedagogy defined in terms not of *being*, but of *becoming*. The most important thing is the basic attitude that ought to be shared by all the members of the circle, i.e. that they be prepared to break out of their traditional roles, have an open mind and contribute with their own knowledge on terms that are the same for everybody.

WHY RESEARCH CIRCLES? One question that is often raised is whether it is really necessary to include a researcher in order to start a productive process. Isn't it enough with a good teacher? I wish to address this question

by stating that *there are several good reasons* why a researcher, and preferably a post-graduate one, should be in charge of the research circle. To have one's PhD means to be accepted in the "scientific community", an important attribute which raises the status both of the work of the research circle and its results.

In addition, and purely for reasons of fairness, it is about time that people other than industrial leaders and their likes be allowed access to the knowledge that accumulates in the academic disciplines. The fact that it is a union problem that constitutes the starting point of a research circle means that the researchers who choose to get involved are letting the interests of the participants dictate the general direction of the circle. This is not without its difficulties. Freire has this to say about intellectuals who wish to put themselves in the service of the working class:

Our converts...truly desire to transform the unjust order; but because of their background they believe that they must be the executors of the transformation. (Freire 1971, p 46)

I have heard similar views expressed by high-ranking union officials and other "information-givers" in the circles. The researcher in charge of the circle should therefore be engaged in a continuous struggle to maintain the trusting and mutual attitude that must characterize the work. In a chapter entitled *Pedagogy as Science and Science as Pedagogy*, the Norwegian social scientist Regi Enerstvedt discusses both the problems inherent in the subject/object relationship as well as the necessary conditions and the ideal participants of a process which develops an emancipatory science. One meaningful requirement, according to Enerstvedt, is:

...it (science) should not only be *about* the people, but *for* the people. Hence, its truth and meaning must take shape in communication *with* the people, not just the scientific profession and the rulers. It is in this last aspect that mutual pedagogy comes into play. (Enerstvedt 1971, p 83)

Enerstvedt goes on to say that when science is born out of communication it can never be indifferent, neutral or passive to the conditions that close off or hinder this communication:

If it wants to survive, it must struggle. *Together* with the political forces that are working to change the conditions that hamper free communication, *against* those that defend those conditions. This is part of the pedagogy of social science. It is a political pedagogy. And only when it is aware that it is can it be scientific. (ibid, p 84)

One reason that the person in charge of the circle should be a trained researcher is that this increases the possibility to view scientific results with a critical eye, including the work of those researchers who are invited to share their results with the circle and those who insist on being in possession of the "truth". It is important to instill this critical attitude into all the participants.

Another important reason is that researchers are accustomed to seek out information, sift through available data and make contact with other researchers. For this purpose, it is important in the near future to build up a network of researchers who would be interested in participating in these activities.

The last and perhaps most important reason I wish to invoke here is that researchers, who in many respects are considered authorities, can help make society's silent groups more visible. It is about time that we relieved these people of the idea that they are not worth anything, a view that goes back years, maybe even decades. If a person is met with respect and sincere interest by a researcher in a smaller setting, this can have a major impact on his or her self-image and world-view. In the words of Camus (as quoted by Carmichael):

...when a slave stops accepting the definitions imposed on him by his master - then, and only then, will he begin to set himself in motion and create an independent existence. (after Carmichael 1969, p 135)

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